

**EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes towards English Language  
Assessment in a Saudi University's English Language Institute**

*Submitted By*

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## **Dedication**

To my beloved wife Zilal, without whom none of my success would have been possible. Thank you for always believing in me and bearing with me throughout the hardest of times.

## **Abstract**

State universities in Saudi Arabia have adopted a new educational policy, which made English the medium of instruction for all scientific departments. This has led to establishing a Foundation Year Programme (FYP) in the English Language Institute (ELI) of those universities, which aims to prepare university students to cope with the new academic requirements in their chosen majors and to improve their overall language competence. This study investigates teachers' roles and beliefs regarding assessment practices in the ELI with the aim to uncover not only the role(s) teachers play in both continuous and summative assessment practices, but also teachers' understandings of and attitudes towards assessment and their roles in it. Findings will also include how teachers perceive this role in this interpretive study, where the data were collected using open-ended interviews with twenty male and female expatriate and Saudi EFL teachers who work in the ELI of a specific Saudi university. The data were analysed on the basis of participants' views and explanations about their roles in both continuous and summative assessment in the institution. The findings revealed that teachers had no role in summative assessment unless they were members of the Assessment Committee and that most teachers wanted to have a voice and be more involved. While teachers had a limited role in continuous assessment in the classroom, they felt the need for more involvement in the choice of materials/topics employed as well as more freedom regarding the way it is administered. The study also revealed that the ELI was not well receptive of criticism from teachers, which made teachers sometimes reluctant to being more involved in assessment or voicing their views in fear of being labelled negatively. Finally, some contributions to knowledge, implications for the context and recommendations are provided as well as some suggestions for improving teachers' roles in assessment for future consideration.

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## List of Abbreviations

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	(KSA)
Foundation Year Programme	(FYP)
English as a Foreign Language	(EFL)
English Language Institute	(ELI)
The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages	(CEFR)
Multiple Choice Questions	(MCQ)
Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages	(DELTA)
Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages	(CELTA)
Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics	(STEM)
English as the Medium of Instruction	(EMI)
Critical Period Hypothesis	(CPH)
Test of English as a Foreign Language	(TEOFL)
The International English Language Testing System	(IELTS)
Test of English for International Communication	(TOEIC)
Ministry of Higher Education	(MoHE)
Ministry of Education	(MoE)

## Chapter One: Introduction

In schools and universities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) the official language is Arabic and English is taught as a foreign language. However, with the growing importance of English as the language of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), many universities have decided to use textbooks that are in English. Around 2009, most Saudi Universities introduced English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) for all Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines, which resulted in the establishment of the Foundation Year Programme (FYP) with two major aims: (1) to prepare students to deal with the academic requirements of their different undergraduate majors and (2) to prepare the university students in different scientific fields to be taught in the medium of English. Within my university, the English language Institute (ELI), is responsible for raising the level of English language proficiency of the newly-graduated secondary school students to enable them to cope with EMI as future undergraduate students. The institution currently provides general English language courses for over 12,000 male and female full-time FYP students annually and employs around 600 qualified faculty members across the Men's and Women's Campuses.

This FYP is very important for students because succeeding in this programme allows them to pursue their studies at the university and, likewise, their overall results will determine the colleges they join in their future studies. Therefore, students' assessment and exams during this year are of great importance because of their significant impact on students' future academic life. Such tests are referred to in the literature as high-stakes tests (Fulcher, 2010). According to the Shohamy (2001), each type of test relates to different stakeholders (e.g. teachers, institution administrators, students or test developers). Therefore, it is important to involve one of the main stakeholders in this study in terms of language assessment and testing procedures: teachers. According to Campbell and Collins (2007), all teachers are involved in assessment and testing in some way or another although it could be argued that teachers sometimes do not want to be involved in testing or assessment. This idea is supported by Jacobs and Chase (1992) who found out

that assessment and testing maybe the least pleasant aspect of the teachers' job. Nevertheless, when teachers implement assessment effectively, students' achievements are bound to improve (Campbell & Collins, 2007).

This study aims to explore the different assessment beliefs that teachers in the ELI hold in order to gain a greater understanding of teachers' roles in the ELI in matters of assessment policy. The study will attempt to find out whether the teachers are involved or excluded from assessment, if they are involved to what extent and if they are excluded the study will attempt to reveal if this exclusion is self-inflicted or forced by the administration. Also, the study will attempt to uncover actual teachers' understanding of and attitudes towards assessment. I am also interested in looking at the overall language policy in the ELI. More specifically, I would like to examine how tests are prepared and whether teachers have a voice in them. In other words, I would like to find out whether tests are "consensus-based", formulated as a result of discussion and debate among teachers, or simply dictated and implemented as a top-down procedure.

According to Hughes (2003) and Coombe, Davidson, O'Sullivan and Stoyhoff (2012), it is important to have 'test specifications' when developing tests. Based on this, this study seeks to find out if the ELI adopts a specific model when designing tests and whether such model includes the involvement of teachers. Alternatively, it is worth investigating whether the tests administered in the ELI are adapted from ready-made materials in addition to examining the role of the teachers in this process.

## **1.1 Importance of the Foundation Year Programme**

Language testing and assessment is a complex social phenomenon which changes lives of educational stakeholders including students. In this respect, the FYP is very important for students because failing the programme means that they cannot further their studies at university. Therefore, the intensive language courses students undertake in the ELI play an important role in this complex social phenomenon. Unfortunately, a number of students perceive tests as a heavy burden they have to carry. If they fail, their life will change and they will be suspended from university and will not be able to proceed with their chosen field of

studies, thereby jeopardising their whole future. Teachers and students are both affected by the high-stakes testing policy in the ELI; however, although teachers are one of the major stakeholders, it seems that their opinion and voice are often left out during the decision-making process in the institution. This does not seem to be limited to the ELI only as very limited research is available on teachers' beliefs concerning assessment and the design and implementation of assessment practices (Chang, 2005; and Troudi, Coombe & Al-Hamly, 2009).

High-stakes testing places a huge pressure on the ELI to ensure that students are able to pass the test and join their respective departments. The issue still remains that sometimes students pass the foundation year, but still fail to cope with the requirements of their academic departments due to their low level of English proficiency. Beyond the reasons behind such failure, and whether this is the teachers', students' or curricula's responsibility, this study could shed some light on why/how students are able to pass their exams and other assessments within the institution, yet still demonstrate low levels of English proficiency. The ELI assessment practices, like in any other similar institution, should validate and measure students' knowledge, skills and competence consistently with the institutional goals. Based on the above, this study will attempt to find out if the current assessment practices are effective in achieving this goal.

## **1.2 Personal Professional Experience and Nature of the Problem**

In 2008, when I started working in the ELI as a member of the testing committee, I realised that a great number of teachers were concerned about the quality of the tests available in addition to the multitude of tests students had to take. During that time, there was a sense among a great number of colleagues within the ELI that all of the teaching and class time was dedicated to the preparation of tests, thereby affecting the actual everyday teaching and learning and somehow producing a 'washback' effect (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). As a member of the testing committee, I have noticed that testing and testing procedures in the ELI were all informed by a 'top-down' approach to assessment. When discussing such issues with colleagues, it always led to the conclusion that teachers cannot do anything to change the tests or test procedures. However, it is important, in my opinion, to

engage teachers in the assessment procedures adopted by the institution in order to ensure that the available assessment practices and objectives take into consideration practical aspects of classroom assessment such as issues of validity, reliability, practicality, washback, transparency, security and usefulness.

### **1.3 Assessment and Testing**

The terms *assessment* and *testing* are sometimes used interchangeably; however, for the purpose of this study, a subtle, yet significant, distinction should be made between these terms. Assessment usually involves a large variety of procedures and refers to the wider umbrella notion of *students' achievement monitoring* or the impact of a programme on learners (Chase, 1999) while testing refers to “a set of specified, uniform tasks to be performed by students, these tasks being an appropriate sample from the knowledge or skills in a border field of content” (p.4).

This research not only aims to look at the role of teachers in testing, but also seeks to investigate their role under the umbrella of assessment in the ELI to gain a wider and deeper understanding of their roles in assessment due to the fact that “language testing practices are fundamentally different from assessment practices in most other disciplines, not only because of the complexity of the domain being tested but also because of the different types of tests that language teachers and administrators can and do use” (Brown & Hudson, 1998, p.657).

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The positivist paradigm informs most of the research on language assessment in the Arab Gulf area and in Saudi Arabia in particular. This is because traditional testing aims at creating tests for the purpose of measuring linguistic knowledge as accurately as possible (Shohamy, 2001). This study aims to explore teachers' roles in assessment in an interpretive socio-cultural manner, which incorporates an interaction of political, educational, managerial and institutional agendas (Pennycook, 2001; and Shohamy, 2001). It is worth mentioning that such investigations into how cultural and institutional contexts affect and shape teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards assessment in Saudi Arabia are very limited (Davison, 2004; and Troudi et al., 2009). Swaffield and Thomas (2016) Also

mention in their article that most of the published work in the field of educational assessment is in the Western world advocating for the need for explanation of the field in different educational contexts around the world.

Therefore, this research investigates the role of teachers in assessment in a specific context by not only focusing on the role of teachers in the assessment committee, but also on the role of the remaining teachers that are not part of the committee. It aims to uncover actual teachers' understanding of and attitudes towards assessment in the current context. Currently, few studies discuss issues of voice and teacher knowledge with regards assessment; therefore, it is hoped that this study will illuminate this area especially in the Saudi context.

In my opinion, there is a certain dominance of the institutional needs in the ELI assessment over the teachers' and students' needs, which can only be shown by examining *what* is assessed and *how* it is assessed in the ELI; hence, the purpose of this study. During the foundation year, the ELI aims to prepare students to be taught in the medium of English; therefore, it seems logical to assess students on their ability to use English in their studies and communication skills. However, it could be argued that the current tests, designed by different international book publishers, such as Oxford for example, are not actually testing these particular aspects, which therefore, questions the validity of such tests. It should also be noted that the institutional needs might not always agree with the students' and the teachers' needs.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The study will investigate the teachers' role and beliefs in assessment in the English Language Institute at a Saudi University guided by the following two key research questions:

1. What is the role of the English Language Institution (ELI) teachers in the language assessment practices implemented at a university foundation year programme in Saudi Arabia?
2. What are the teachers' understanding of and attitudes towards language assessment and their role in it?



## **1.6 Organisation of the thesis**

The thesis contains seven chapters. The above chapter introduced the study while Chapter 2 presents an overview of the context of the study: the ELI in a Saudi University. Chapter 3 discusses the relevant literature in the field of language testing and language policy, which are rapidly growing areas. Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology giving a detailed description of the participants, methods, ethical procedures and limitations of the study. Chapter 5 presents the findings obtained from the analysis of the interview data. Chapter 6 discusses the results in addition to offering a number of suggestions for future research. Finally, Chapter 7 puts forward the conclusion, implications, limitations and recommendations.

## **Chapter Two: Study Context**

Now that the research questions and the significance of the study have been highlighted, it is very important to present a detailed overview of the education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This will help in making sense of the data reported in the later chapters. I will briefly present the historical background of higher education before the official proclamation of the country, the status of the English language in Saudi Arabia, the history of English teaching, the FYP as well as the current assessment procedure in the ELI. In addition, the students' achievement reporting system and an overview of the ELI teachers and students will be highlighted. The topics and models presented here will be utilised as reference in later chapters.

### **2.1 History of English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932 as a monarchy whereby the King is the Head of State and Prime Minister with all Ministries under his jurisdiction, including the Ministry of Education (MoE). Saudi Arabia is a Muslim country ruled by Shari'ah Law and shortly after the discovery of oil in 1935, the MoE was established and the first school opened later on that year (Almunajjed, 1997).

With regards to English language teaching, Al-Maini (2002) claims that English was introduced in the country as early as 1926 when education started in the region before the KSA was founded. However, Al-Seghayer (2005) argues that it is unclear when English was exactly introduced in the country, assigning this to the fact that Saudi Arabia was never occupied by any European power, thus the introduction of English did not come as a necessity but rather as a way of developing international links with the world. Saudi Arabia decided to introduce English into its educational system in order to facilitate communication within the oil industry as well as to deal with Muslims from all around the world visiting the two Holy Mosques (Meccawy, 2010). Other writers, such as Al Abed Al Haq and Smadi (1996), documented that English was already being taught in elementary schools (ages 6 to 12) when the MoE was first established in 1935. In that year, the

educational system was transformed and English was only taught in intermediate schools (ages 12 to 15) and secondary schools (age 16 to 18) as a compulsory subject until 2004 when the Ministry decided to reintroduce English in elementary schools.

Lenneberg (1967) argued for the 'Critical Period Hypothesis' (CPH) in language acquisition. This hypothesis claims that the first two years in a child's life are the most critical in language acquisition. However, since the 70s researchers suggested the opposite and that there is no optimum age for a child to start learning a second language (Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978), also an amount of research in the last ten years further rejects these assumptions of the CPH in second language acquisition (Brice & Brice, 2008; DeKeyser, Alfi-Shabtay & Ravid 2010; and Jia & Fuse, 2007). However, it seems that the Saudi MOE is still adopting the CPH, arguing that young children acquire a second language better than adults. Thereby, since 2004 the Saudi MoE introduced English in the fourth grade in public schools with future plans to introduce it as early as the first grade. It should be noted that private schools in the KSA have the freedom of introducing English to children at any age.

English has a very important place in the Saudi educational system and most Saudis think that English is essential for the individual as well as the nation's prosperity (Al-Seghayer, 2014). English is most commonly used as the language of instruction in the STEM disciplines (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015), including medical fields, and it has been a compulsory subject in higher education preparatory year programmes (Clark, 2014). Thus, in order to be successful in terms of technical and professional skills, it is essential to attain minimum proficiency levels in English language. As a result, the need for English proficiency test and English language assessment has become important. Assessment involves the process of giving students tests and grades to identify potential shortcomings either on the part of students or teachers (Palacios & Evans, 2013). Moreover, if Saudi students ought to be recognised internationally, the tests conducted for them need to be "high stake" tests and students who wish to compete their studies abroad have to pass the FYP to be able to be admitted to eminent universities (Downey, 2015).

## **2.2 History of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia**

The history of higher education in Saudi Arabia dates back to 1975 when the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) was established. The first university in Saudi Arabia was called Riyadh University –now known as King Saud University (Saleh, 1986). Since then, there has been a rapid increase in the number of universities; by 1986, there were seven universities (ibid). Recently, in March 2015 the MoHE was merged to the MoE under one single Ministry: the “Ministry of Education”. Nowadays, the number of universities has reached twenty-four public high-capacity universities in addition to ten private universities distributed all over Saudi Arabia. This remarkable increase in the number of universities occurred in order to cope with the huge increase in population, which demanded higher education provision in different fields of study. It should be mentioned that the MoE is also responsible for the affairs of Saudi students studying abroad, scattered in different countries and continents all around the world.

Higher education in Saudi Arabia is gender-segregated, which means that men and women study at separate campuses and do not meet, except in medical specialities; male students are taught by male teachers while female teachers teach only female students. Female students may be taught by a male teacher using a secured tele link whereby the teacher is facing a camera and can only listen without seeing any of his female students while they can see him through a screen.

In the KSA, English language education has always been a challenge for the MoHE. Although it is an essential language in tertiary education and despite the fact that the ability to read, write and speak English fluently is viewed as a commodity and a basic skill needed in the job market, the proficiency levels achieved by undergraduate students are mostly unsatisfactory (Al-Awad, 2002). A study conducted by the MoHE indicated that a great number of Saudi Arabian employers found that fresh university graduates are good in specific subject knowledge but lack many of the workplace skills, especially in terms of English language skills (Asad, 2009). This, in my opinion, is one of the aspects that led

universities to introduce the FYP in higher education as presented and discussed in more detail in the following section.

## **2.3 The Foundation Year Programme**

Since the establishment of the FYP in most Saudi universities in 2006, all newly admitted students have to follow this one-year orientation programme in order to be admitted to an undergraduate programme. During this year, students are expected to gain the English skills necessary for undergraduate study in addition to strengthen other academic skills. Besides EFL, students have to study different subjects based on their specialisation. Students following scientific disciplines take the following subjects: communication skills, chemistry, statistics, physics, computer skills, biology and mathematics. As for the Arts and Humanities students, in addition to EFL, they have to study arts communication skills, critical/analytic thinking skills, Arabic language, computer skills, Islamic culture and mathematics.

With regard to the context of this study, all students have to pass exams and assessments in order to successfully complete six credit units of general English before starting their desired studies at their various colleges. It is the responsibility of the ELI to provide general English language courses to around 12,000 male and female full-time FYP students annually. This places a considerable amount of importance on the assessment and evaluation procedures adopted by the ELI. Students who fail to obtain these six credits for any reason are expelled from the university, which means that the programme has high stakes for the students and the university.

## **2.4 English Status in Saudi Arabia**

According to Kachru (1985), English spread around the world through three broad categories that present “the types of spread, the patterns of acquaintance and the functional domains in which English is used across cultures and languages” (p.12). The first category covers countries where English is the first language –*the inner circle*– such as, for example, the United States or the United Kingdom where English is the mother tongue. The second category –*the outer circle*– covers countries like Bangladesh and India where English is the official language but used

as a second language as it is not the mother tongue and not widely used. Finally, the third category –*the expanding circle*– covers countries such as Saudi Arabia, the context of this study, where English is learned as a foreign language (Smeyers, Bridges, Burbules & Griffiths, 2015).

In this third circle, English is used as a tool for communication, diplomacy, business, trade and nowadays as a medium of instruction for STEM disciplines in higher education. This huge importance positioned English as a legitimate EMI, making it the only foreign language in Saudi Arabia that students are obliged to learn in schools and universities (Al-Abed Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996). One major contribution to this is the rapid economic transformation that Saudi Arabia is undergoing (Al-Kibsi, Woetzel, Isherwood, Khan, Mischke, & Noura, 2015; and Al-Abed Al-Haq & Al-Masaeid, 2009). As a result, English is now incorporated in all of the educational levels from elementary up to higher education.

## **2.5 Foundation Year ELI Curriculum**

According to the ELI Faculty Handbook (Kinsara, 2011), the English language FYP curriculum contains four core language courses. To start each module, faculty members are given a detailed curriculum and syllabi with expected learning outcomes for each course. They are also provided with a detailed *pacing guide* for each module, which includes a day-to-day lesson planning guidelines detailing exactly how many textbook units and language items are to be presented and practiced during a specified period. This pacing guide is modified each year based on faculty members' feedback. The ELI offers the four English language courses in the FYP as follows:

- ELI 101 (Level 1 – CEFR A0) Beginner: 0 credit
- ELI 102 (Level 2 – CEFR A1) Elementary: 2 credits
- ELI 103 (Level 3 – CEFR A2) Pre-Intermediate: 2 credits
- ELI 104 (Level 4 – CEFR B1) Intermediate: 2 credits

The total number of credits assigned to these ELI courses is six, which is the largest allocation of credit units given to a course in the FYP. Students taking these ELI courses are also required to study other university courses as previously

mentioned. All course materials are based on the use of the English Unlimited Special Edition Course Book with e-Portfolio DVD-ROM. Different levels of exercises in speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary are introduced in each level as summarised in the following table:

**Table 1: Curriculum Mapping for Different Levels**

<b>ELI LEVEL</b>	<b>English Unlimited Special Edition Course book</b>	<b>Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level</b>
<b>ELI 101</b>	<i>English Unlimited, Special Edition, Starter Course book with e-Portfolio DVD-ROM</i>	<b>A1</b> <b>'Breakthrough'</b>
<b>ELI 102</b>	<i>English Unlimited, Special Edition, Elementary Course book with e-Portfolio DVD-ROM</i>	<b>A2</b> <b>'Waystage'</b>
<b>ELI 103</b>	<i>English Unlimited, Special Edition, Pre-Intermediate Course book with e-Portfolio DVD- ROM</i>	<b>B1</b> <b>'Threshold'</b>
<b>ELI 104</b>	<i>English Unlimited, Special Edition, Intermediate Course book with e-Portfolio DVD- ROM</i>	<b>B1 +</b>

## 2.6 Current Assessment Procedures in the ELI

It should be mentioned that the FYP contains four English modules with two in each semester (a semester lasts for approximately six weeks) using the following assessment procedures:

- A placement test at the beginning of the year (no marks) which happens only once students join the university.
- A continuous portfolio containing extended writing tasks, workbook and home assignments, reading comprehension tasks, grammar and vocabulary quizzes and weekly reflections (10% of the final grade).

- Two in-term writing exams. The format ranges from basic writing function questions to paragraph and essay construction. The time allocated is between thirty to forty minutes and the exams count for 10% of the final grade.
- Two in-term speaking exams. The format ranges from basic interviews with leading questions –for lower levels– to short interactive presentations in class to demonstrate progression in this skill. The time allocated is between three to five minutes and the exam count for 10% of the final grade.
- One mid-module exam containing forty-five multiple choice questions with focus on comprehension, both reading and listening, as well as grammar, usage and vocabulary of units covered in the first three weeks of the module. The time allocated is ninety minutes and the exam counts for 30% of the final grade.
- One final module exam with sixty multiple choice questions with focus on comprehension, both reading and listening, as well as grammar, usage, and vocabulary of units covered in the entire module. The time allocated is 105 minutes and the exam counts for 40% of the final grade.

The placement test is used to determine the proficiency level of the students and distribute them in their appropriate levels in order to cater for their general language-learning needs. This test was developed by Oxford University Press (OUP), based on courses levels of the *New Headway Plus Special Edition* textbook series. Students take this test only once after their admission into the university. They are placed in their relevant levels according to placement test scores ranging between 0-120. However, in case of failure to attend the test, students are automatically enrolled in the lowest level.

The above exams are administered by the ELI Testing Committee, a part of the Academic Affairs Unit of the ELI. Currently, a system is under process to digitalise most of the exams to allow students in the future to take these examinations electronically using a computer, which could save a great amount of time and effort for teachers and minimise paperwork. The ELI expects all faculty members' contribution and assistance to the testing committee in the preparation of



examinations claiming that their efforts are appreciated and noted. In addition, faculty members are encouraged to give their classes progress tests that have no weight in the overall evaluation of the students. They can either be teacher-generated or taken from the books made available to the teachers. Teachers also have access to online testing resources, which are included in the package of materials teachers receive in the beginning of the year. Each of these assessment instruments can be tailored to suit individual classes and needs.

All the above tests account for a total of 100 marks per module and students can only pass each module if they obtain 60% or over giving them the right to enrol in a higher ELI level. If this score is not attained, the student must re-enrol in the same course as scheduled during the FYP. Students have a maximum of three additional chances to take all four ELI modules by the end of the first half of their second academic year. In case of failure to achieve this, the rules and regulations of the FYP stipulate that the student is to be terminated. As explained earlier, this puts a huge emphasis on testing and assessment in the ELI as passing the courses is considered a high-stakes test for the students, each time in all four levels.

## **2.7 Students' Achievement Reporting**

In the ELI, the assessment of students does not end with the last examination as teachers are also required to write a comprehensive report, by end of the sixth week of each module, about the knowledge and understanding gained from evaluating a student's learning, which serves as a means of accountability for students' learning outcomes. Each teacher is typically in charge of cohorts of twenty to sixty students and as clarified by the ELI Handbook (Kinsara, 2011), the report should include information about the following aspect relating to students' learning:

- academic progress in understanding presented materials
- quality of portfolio assignments
- commitment to learning
- areas of academic strengths and weaknesses
- participation in class discussion, activities and conversation

- attitude towards the instructor and classmates
- involvement in extra-curricular activities
- independent learning
- potential

Following the written reports, including recommendations, students have the optional opportunity to discuss it with the instructor; the discussion with the student is conducted with appropriate privacy safeguards. Students should acknowledge the discussion and recommendations with their teachers by signing the report. Finally, the ELI requires from the teachers to provide the report to the level coordinator for submission and filing with the Academic Affairs Unit. This emphasises the role of the teacher in the learning process.

## **2.8 Teachers' Backgrounds**

The English Language Institute employs more than 600 faculty members across the Men's and Women's Campuses (Kinsara, 2011). They fall under three different categories. First, the Saudi teachers, who usually hold a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature or Linguistics, constitute a minority with only over sixty teachers in the institution on tenured positions. The second category is the Western teachers, who usually come from the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia (inner circle countries). The third category include other international teachers from different countries such as Pakistan, India, South Africa, Malaysia, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, etc. (outer circle countries). The previous two categories of teachers are employed on one-year-contracts and the weekly teaching/working hours for all three categories range between fourteen to twenty-four hours per week. No special knowledge of testing or experience with evaluation is required from any of the above-mentioned teacher categories. In other words, the institution does not hire specialists in testing and assessment but rather uses the available resources to cope with the institutional testing and evaluation needs. It should be mentioned, however, that the ELI sometimes favours Western teachers and Saudi teachers when it comes to testing and assessment. It should be noted that, even if teachers are highly qualified teachers that are not Saudi/Western, the institution

tends to “unofficially” avoid selecting them for positions in the assessment committee.

## **2.9 Students' Backgrounds**

The vast majority of public university students in Saudi Arabia are Saudi nationals because non-Saudi nationals are not entitled to places in public universities (except in some cases when students are on scholarships from the Saudi government usually in Islamic studies and/or Arabic language studies). They are all secondary schools graduates from both the Arts or Sciences tracks whose ages range between eighteen to twenty years old. The students who join the University and the ELI are either graduates of state schools or/and private schools. After joining the university, secondary school students from the sciences track are given the choice to either continue in the FYP Sciences path or, if they wish, join the Arts path while the Arts graduates can only join the Arts FYP path. Both FYP paths have the same number of credits and hours of English instruction. However, the level of English taught in the Sciences path is slightly higher than the Arts. Finally, the university where the study took place is located in western region of KSA, a great number of students and teachers from all over the kingdom and the world join/ leave the university every year.

## **2.10 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter presented a historical overview of education in the KSA before and after the foundation of the country. In addition, the FYP and the status of English in KSA was discussed and the FYP curriculum and structure presented showing its general structure and overall features as well as a brief background of teachers and students in the ELI. The following chapter reviews and discusses the literature on subjects of importance to the study with emphasis on assessment and testing, which will allow to focus on the aims of the study and its chosen research methods and data analysis techniques to address the key research questions.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

In this chapter, I first define and classify the different kinds of assessment, namely: formative, continuous, and summative. In addition, the chapter briefly presents a historical outline of testing and English language assessment then highlights the definitions and criticism of psychometric testing. Then, teachers' thoughts and roles in assessments are highlighted and finally, the chapter ends by discussing the literature on language testing from a critical perspective.

### 3.1 Introduction

The relationship between the notions of evaluation, assessment and testing is often cited in the literature. As shown in Figure 1 below, evaluation serves as an umbrella term within the field of education while assessment is part of the evaluation process and testing belongs to assessment.

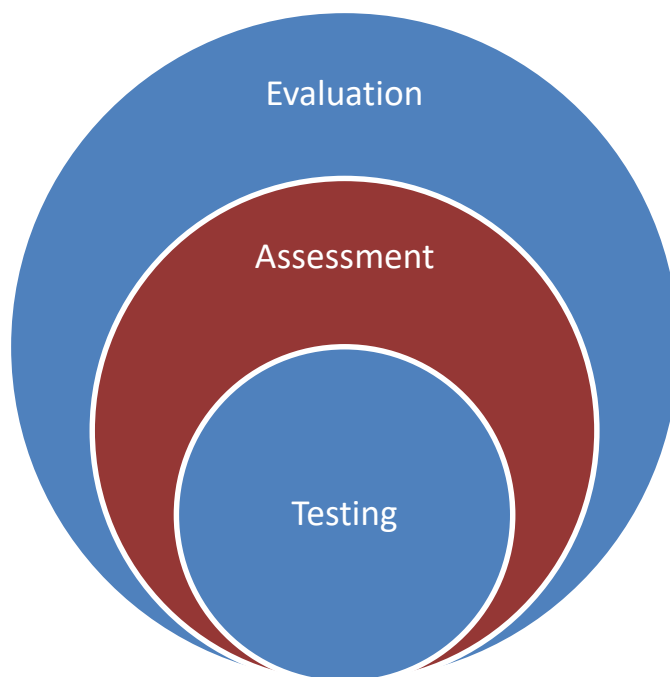


Figure 1: Relationship between Evaluation, Assessment, and Testing

### 3.2 Definitions of Assessment

The term *testing* is often associated with large-scale standardised tests whereas the term *assessment* is used in a much wider sense to mean a variety of

approaches in testing and assessment (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss all English language assessment issues. Since this study focuses on assessment with frequent references to evaluation and testing, the definition of the term assessment is of crucial importance for the study in order to understand its preponderance in teaching and learning. Assessment is quite an old concept as explained by Rowntree (1987, p.4) who views it as a “human encounter” whereby, he argues, assessment occurs when one person attempts to obtain and interpret specific information about the knowledge and understanding or abilities and attitudes of other human beings. Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2010) define assessment as “a systematic approach to collecting information and making inferences about the ability of a student or the quality or success of a teaching course on the basis of various sources of evidence” (pp.35-36). Both definitions agree on the notion that assessment involves humans trying to understand and evaluate specific characteristics and behaviours of other human beings. Nonetheless, Gipps and Stobart (1993) take a different approach to assessment and claim that it is a universal term incorporating exams and tests that measure pupils’ learning. It seems important to argue here that this definition is quite limited as assessment usually incorporates more than just ‘exams and tests’, but on the contrary, the practice of assessment can be implemented through a variety of tools such as, for instance, tests, interviews, questionnaires or observations (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Furthermore, assessment itself can also be conducted for reasons other than evaluating the students and giving them grades like, for example, checking the comprehension of students such as in the case of immigrants studying English to check if they are able to follow a course of study in a school or whether extra language teaching is needed. Another objective of assessment can be to check if a student's language is improving and developing, which is usually done by administering a test at the beginning and at the end of each academic semester to assess the quality of teaching at an institution in that specific term. Therefore, assessment is sometimes important in non-academic contexts as well.

Although, in my view, understanding the terms *assessment* and *testing* is important for any English language teacher, I would like to argue that it is not sufficient to

only to know what *testing* and *assessment* are and instead, I am advocating that, with respect to my place of work, teachers' assessment literacy is a far more important issue. Indeed, teachers' assessment literacy relates to teachers' ability to assess students efficiently, which also involves a clear understanding of the 'principles of sound assessment' (Popham, 2004). Therefore, assessment-literate teachers are able to distinguish which assessment methods to use in order to get dependable information about students' levels and to transform these assessment results efficiently through report cards grades, test scores and portfolios. Moreover, being assessment literate also involves teachers using assessment practices to enhance students' learning and motivation by involving and integrating them in the process of assessment, record keeping and communication (Stiggins, 2002).

Based on the above, this study views the notion of assessment as a process of gathering and interpreting evidence to make judgments about students' learning. In addition, 'assessment literate' teachers are able to establish the important link between learning outcomes, content and teaching and learning activities.

Assessment can be utilised by both teachers and students to identify students' levels, their learning needs in terms of achievement and the path they need to follow to reach these goals. Assessment is not only used to evaluate students, but also to improve learning and inform teaching in addition to helping students gain the most of what the classroom can offer while providing representative and accurate reports on their overall achievement (Nelson & Dawson, 2014).

### **3.3 Formative, Continuous and Summative Assessment**

In order to evaluate any educational aspect, information is required and assessment determines how this information is gathered. Lamprianou and Athanasou (2009) state that assessment can be a very helpful tool in education only if the application of assessment is done properly and is well organised. They recognise that many of the criticism that assessment receives is usually because it has not been applied appropriately. Generally speaking, education is concerned with issues that pertain to curricula, teaching methods or course materials and one major source of information about these aspects is the student. However, in order

to acquire information correctly, assessment is required and the type of assessment we use should be determined by our needs (Firth & Macintosh, 1984).

In the field of education, two kinds of assessment are used: formative and summative. Formative assessment refers to the assessment of learning that occurs within the classroom to inform instruction, which enables teachers to make timely instructional decisions based on the students' interaction in the classroom; this can involve formal and informal methods of collecting data from the students. It usually includes students demonstrating their learning, as in observations for example, performance tasks and portfolios; all these methods may be used as formative assessment if both the teachers and the students agree to use the data from such practices to come up with decisions informing instruction in the classroom. This idea of using formative assessment in order to provide information to students and teachers during instruction (not to assign grades) is generally agreed upon in the literature (Black & William, 1998; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Popham, 2003; and Reeves, 2007). Researchers often term this type of assessment as *educative assessment* and it is primarily used to aid learning and not strictly as a tool for evaluation. In addition to the above mentioned methods, formative assessment tools may also include tests, hand in hand with instruction in the classroom, to guide the learning and instructional process (McTighe & O'Connor, 2005).

Summative assessment, on the other hand, differs from the above type of assessment in that it assesses the learner after instruction has taken place. It is often conducted at the end of an academic year or term in the form of a test, final exam, projects or presentations that aim to measure or 'sum up' what the students have gained from the course. In summative assessment, grades, ranks and scores are often used to decide whether the student passes or fails a course or project (Popham, 2003; and Richards & Schmidt, 2010). However, summative assessment can happen throughout the learning process and not as one final exam at the end of the learning process. When this happens, this type of assessment is referred to as 'continuous assessment'. Richards & Schmidt (2010) define it as "an approach to assessment in which students are assessed regularly throughout the programme rather than being given a single assessment at the end. This is thought to give a more accurate picture of student achievement" (p.129). In some cases,

continuous assessment does not entirely replace summative assessment, but forms part of the final grade along with summative exam(s). For example, the ELI allocates 20% of students' final grades to continuous assessment and 80% to summative assessment (See Table 4, p.97). "Continuous assessment usually involves a series of tasks that are individually assessed, though sometimes it is appropriate to add a final assessment to continuous assessment. It is best used when there are several distinct module learning outcomes which are achieved at definable stages during the module" (O'Farrell, 2009, p.5). However, Lynch (2001) disagrees with holding continuous assessment using psychometric summative assessment standards because they both stand on different philosophical grounds. He argues that continuous assessment represents an 'assessment culture' and this sort of paradigm cannot be examined from a psychometric 'testing culture'.

Ronan (2015) explains that formative assessment works like a step-by-step guide for the teachers, which is useful for teachers and students alike, while summative assessment is designed to measure students' achievement at the end of instruction. In Saudi Arabia, as in many other Gulf countries, the weight given to summative assessment is always much greater than the importance given to formative assessment. However, the MoE in the KSA is currently conducting several initiatives to improve the assessment system in schools (Alotabi, 2014).

Metaphorically comparing the two assessment paradigms, Scriven (1991, p.169) once said: "When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative: When the guests taste the soup, that's summative". So, for the teacher (cook) to assess instruction in the classroom (soup), formative assessment must be conducted (tasting); otherwise, when students' (guests) knowledge (soup) is tested (tasted), it is summative assessment (too late to fix the soup). In other words, to take the comprehensive review of the students' progress, they need to be assessed in a formative way and the responsibility of formative assessment should be given to the teachers. Then, only the teachers' involvement will be possible and, as a result, their knowledge and skills would be used in assessment process. When it comes to judging and grading various types of assessment, some testing researchers are adamant that formative assessment should not be judged by the same criteria as conventional tests. In the same stance, Black and Wiliam (1998) state that when it comes to



formative assessment, grades and marks do not deliver as much formative effectiveness and also in some situations can be counterproductive, particularly with learners of lower ability. They advocate that what is needed is tailored comments and high-quality feedback to the students. Hattie (2009) also argues that non-experts in formative assessment tend to collect evidence of student performance i.e. grades and fall into the trap of evaluating the correctness of students' responses. In the same vein, Gipps (2012) warns that applying psychometric standards on formative assessment would produce unreliable statistical assumptions.

### **3.4 Language Assessment Literacy**

Language assessment literacy is important because teachers spend between 10% to 50% of their time on assessment activities. In addition to that, having language teachers who are literate in assessment enables them to collaborate their classroom assessment practices with each other thereby developing a small community of learning (Nieto, 2010). It is also suggested that assessment literacy relates strongly to teachers' Professional Development (PD) (Newfields, 2006). There are three stakeholders for assessment literacy: (1) students who are concerned with knowing how to perform well on tests, (2) teachers being assessment literate means they can effectively and ethically grade their students and (3) test developers for assessment literacy is basically what their everyday work depends on. This study is concerned with assessment literacy for teachers and teacher test developers (ibid). Teachers being assessment literate means that they can perform the following:

1. employ a wide variety of assessment measures without being biased
2. construct, administer and score tests
3. evaluate the reliability, validity, item difficulty of exams.
4. know the cut-off points statistically for examinations
5. intervene when students cheat or engage in unethical behaviours during tests
6. deliver and explain assessment results to other assessment stakeholders

Although the above abilities were developed for the National Council on measurement in education and the National Education Association (ibid), it could be argued that every English language teacher in any institution should be trained in order to have the ability to correctly and efficiently evaluate students' language ability (Short, 2000). This could also guarantee the quality of teaching and assessment. It should be noted that the lack of assessment literacy for teachers is not always the reason behind excluding teachers from assessment practices. Sometimes teachers are excluded from assessment due to top-down policy approaches which is common in language institutions in the Arabic Gulf area (Troudi et al., 2009). Another reason for exclusion might be that developing literacy in technical areas such as the above points 2, 3 and 4 demands and necessitates technical preparation and training that can usually be expensive and time consuming as well.

### **3.5 Dynamic Assessment and Product Oriented Testing**

Language testing can be regarded as a social activity (McNamara, 2001) and the field of second and foreign language learning tends to use 'product oriented testing' when assessing students. The idea behind this type of assessment is to instruct students for a particular amount of time and, at the end, test them on their progress in light of what they have been taught. This widely used testing method has been rejected by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory in relation to assessment, which called for *dynamic assessment*. Vygotsky argues that in order to understand learning and development, teachers have to focus on the process rather than the product of learning. Lantolf and Thorne (2005) further develop this point by explaining that understanding human mental functioning is only possible by studying the process and not simply the results of the development. They also state that dynamic assessment means that teachers should focus on what students are capable of in the classroom with the help of their peers or teachers because what is achieved in the classroom is an indication of what can be achieved in the future by the students on their own, as opposed to what teachers generally do in language courses, that is, measuring the students' development after a specific

period of teaching and then deciding whether the students are capable of further development in light of their results (Poehner, 2008).

Alyousef (2015) conducted a qualitative study in order to investigate the beliefs and perceptions of fourteen undergraduate university EFL students specialised in linguistics and literature in order to identify (1) their perceptions and experiences about formative feedback through summative lecture-based feedback, (2) explore whether the students believed that the course reflected the intended learning outcomes of course and finally to (3) elicit EFL students' views of the course and their assessment preferences. The findings indicated that "the students favoured summative lecture-based assessment via formative weekly assignments" (p.95), which means that summative lecture-based assessment was effective in terms of the learning outcomes. This included improving the EFL students' translation abilities in addition to intellectual abilities and showed that summative assessment benefited their use of corpus concordances.

### **3.6 History of English Language Testing**

Around the year 1913, a great number of individuals from the British colonies around the world were seeking to gain formal education and study at British universities. This led to the introduction of the Cambridge Proficiency Examination (CPE), which was used to test the language performance of students intending to enrol in the British educational system. The idea behind this language examination was drawn from Henry Sweet's (1899) philosophy, which puts emphasis on language use rather than language knowledge. It should be noted, however, that language assessment practices taking place at one time in history are usually a reflection of beliefs about the nature of language learning at that time. For example, in the 1960s, language learning was strongly influenced by Structural Linguistics or the Audio-Lingual methodology; as a result, language assessments and tests were developed to check the learners' ability in different areas of the linguistic system such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

Bachman (2000) also states that from around 1965 until the late 1970s, English language testing was informed mainly by a theoretical view in which language ability is measured through the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading

and writing. At the same time, approaches to test design considered testing an isolated matter from language learning. The main concern of research in testing, at that time, mainly related to the *psychometric reliability* of tests and “back in the mid-1960s, language testing research was dominated largely by the hypothesis that language proficiency consisted of a single unitary trait, and that a quantitative, statistical research methodology was the most appropriate for understanding it” (Tsushima, 2015, p.106). It is worth mentioning that, according to Brindlly (2001), such tests were failing to provide solid data on the learners’ ability to use the language, so the 1970s-80s witnessed a shift towards using more integrative tests, like dictation and close, focusing more on the use of language and contextual knowledge. Again, this idea was later criticised as it was argued that such tests were mainly testing language ability. Therefore, language testers followed the trend of communicative language teaching in that assessment practices started containing tasks focusing on the use of language for communication (Coombe et al., 2012).

Nowadays, the current trend in language assessment is influenced by the idea of *multiple measures assessment*, which is rooted in the belief that not one single type of assessment can provide the assessor with all the information on students’ language ability and proficiency. That is why such multiple measures of data sources should be taken over a span of time and involve multiple assessment stakeholders. To achieve this, a wide variety of assessment procedures must be undertaken by students in order to accurately measure their ability and proficiency level (Coombe et al., 2012).

### **3.7 Standardised Testing**

Anastasi (1988), defines a test as an *objective* and *standardised* measure of a *sample* of behaviour. This definition is unique because it focuses on three major elements in the field of testing: objectivity, standardisation and sample behaviour. Objectivity means that a specific criterion is required when scoring a test; therefore, it is not up to a specific individual to determine a score through personal impression; rather, tests ought to follow pre-determined scoring criteria. Standardisation relates to the idea that no matter who administers or scores the

tests, students' results should always be based on standardised scoring criteria. Finally, the idea of sample of behaviour means that tests do not, for example, provide a comprehensive view on a student's actual knowledge but are more likely to produce a representative sample from which a sound hypothesis of an individual's knowledge and behaviour can be built (Domino & Domino, 2006).

All summative assessments in the ELI and a huge part of continuous assessment are standardised. This means that students in one level share the same mid-terms and final tests from a common bank of questions, in the same way, they are scored in a "standard" or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students. Standardised testing tends to have a bad reputation and has been criticised widely, however, Phelps (2005, p.113) argues that "[p]eople accuse standardized tests of being unfair, biased, and discriminatory. Believe it or not, standardized tests are actually designed to promote test fairness. *Standardised* simply means that the test content is equivalent across administrations and that the conditions under which the test is administered are the same for all test takers". In other words, these tests are designed to provide and be fair to everyone. Phelps (2005) also advocates that just because a test is standardised does not mean it is bad, biased or only measures unimportant things. It simply means that the tests are fair to everyone thereby designed and administrated using uniform procedures in order to provide objective information on the test takers.

Standardised testing is widely used in many organisations throughout the world. For example, they are used for recruitment, selecting job applicants, determining training needs. In this study, the ELI uses one type of psychometric standardised testing that measures the students' language ability which will then determine in what faculties the students can continue their studies. Therefore, when it comes to language testing, standardised testing has three distinctive characteristics. First, such tests are developed on a standard content that should not differ from one test to another. Such content can be based on the needs of specific language users, like the IELTS for example, or it can also be based on a theory of language proficiency, such as, for instance, a test of English as a foreign language. The second characteristic is that all tests are administered following a standard

procedure in terms of scoring, which does not change from one test to another. Such tests are usually developed using empirical research then piloted in order to effectively establish each test characteristics (Bachman, 1990).

Phelps (2005) argues that standardised tests are sometimes accused of containing only multiple choice questions which is not true because according to the test administration and scoring conditions different types of questions can be formed in order to serve the test's purpose. Another misconception is that standardised tests can only measure low level thinking skills. Phelps (2005) disagrees and gives examples two standardised tests in the US (The Graduate Records Exam and Law School Admissions Test) claiming that those, and others, standardised tests can in fact require higher and complicated level of thinking skills.

### **3.8 Criticisms of Standardised Testing**

Despite the various arguments supporting psychometric testing, it should be noted that the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a decline in the status of psychometric, statistically driven approaches to assessment (Weir, 2005). Weir (2005) argues that "in its place there has been a growing interest in the importance of context, in defining domain of use performance conditions and operations" (p.56). Others have also challenged the idea of Standardised testing including, for instance, Mannering (2013) who claims that anyone can sway the answers. In other words, this type of assessment can provide us with results that do not reflect the actual knowledge status of an individual. Another study, conducted by the Brookings Institution in 2001 (as cited in Olson, 2001) found out that 50% to 80% of the students' improvement from one year to the next are only temporary. The study argues that standardised tests did not help in this improvement and that the improvement could be simply explained by a fluctuation of grades that had nothing to do with long-term improvement of the students' learning (Olson, 2001). Strauss (2011) also argues that standardised tests fail to measure what makes education meaningful as she states that creativity, critical thinking, motivation, persistence, curiosity, endurance and enthusiasm are all usually neglected aspects in standardised tests. For Sacks (2000), in standardised testing, the use of multiple-choice format is an inadequate assessment tool because it encourages a simplistic

way of making decisions in a world where only one answer is correct, which does not actually apply in the real world. He also argues that this multiple-choice format always favours male students who have proven to adapt more to the game-like point-scoring than females.

Harmer (2010) states that huge pressure applies on teachers to teach for the test because, in many cases, the main objective of the students is to pass the test. In other words, teachers often build their class material, exercises, assignments and activities around the items to be tested in the final exam, hence ignoring the overall course learning outcomes. Students are getting used to study only what is expected to be tested in the final exam, which can be very serious, especially if they manage to score high grades without having to study the entire class material.

Wall and Alderson (1993, p. 68) referred to this idea and specifically stated that “tests have impact on what teachers teach but not on how they teach”. Therefore, it could be argued that the test will not only dictate what is being taught, but also take up most of the teaching time allocated for the learners, thereby affecting the learning process as a whole. Shohamy (2006, p.104) supports this idea and addresses the following warning:

Centralized tests are capable of dictating to teachers what to teach and what test-takers will study, as teachers, and test-takers, comply with the demands of the tests by changing their behaviour so as to maximize the scores, given the detrimental effects of the tests.

Teachers need to be careful not to become servants of the tests and neglect to focus on the students learning, which remains, after all, the main objective of teaching (Broadfoot, 1996).

Hamp-Lyons (1996) takes the detrimental effects of standardised testing to another level when she argues that standardised testing does not only affect the learners and educational system, but also society as a whole. She views the washback effect as a form of impact “pervading every aspect of our instruments and scoring procedures” (p.299) and argues that in order to minimise the effect of testing on society, all stakeholders’ perspectives need to be taken into consideration. According to her, testing stakeholders include learners, teachers, parents, official

bodies and the marketplace, and they should all be involved in assessment and testing design in a collaborative manner. Wyatt-Smith and Gunn (2009) also include other stakeholders such as the students and emphasise on the importance of their “involvement in assessment practices, suggesting that maximum learning comes from productive interactions between teachers and students, with both sharing the responsibility for making learning and assessment effective” (p.93).

I believe that testing and standardised testing can benefit the learning process if teachers utilise tests and use them in an effective way. This stance is supported by Black (2004) as he argues that standardised testing has huge beneficial impact on students’ achievement although they are not adequate on their own as a foundation for assessment in the learning environment. He states that they provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’ being achieved, he argues that the fact that teachers do not take advantage of these opportunities, does not mean that there is a problem with the test, but simply that educators are not benefiting completely from the tests and enhancing the learning process. Therefore, as long as standardised testing and psychometric testing are currently the common practices in the education system in the KSA, the government should might as well invest in training teachers to become assessment literate and thereby making the most of standardised testing in the Kingdom (Alotabi, 2014).

Now that some light has been shed in the areas of assessment, assessment types and history and that the strengths and weaknesses of psychometric testing have been introduced, it is essential to bear in mind the study’s key focus that pertains to the importance of teachers’ beliefs in assessment. Indeed, as previously highlighted, this study views teachers as a major stakeholder and their role as an important aspect in terms of assessment.

### **3.9 Washback**

In any language institution, high stake tests usually have a washback effect on the teaching and learning taking place. Washback, or what Hughes (2003) initially termed as *backwash*, refers to “the impact that a test has on the teaching and learning” (Green, 2013, p.39) while Hamp-Lyons (1996) defined it as a set of beliefs on the relationship between testing and teaching and learning. In a similar



vein, Luxia (2005) argues that testing has a direct effect on the educational system, content and format of the curriculum and society in general. Shohamy (1992) focuses on washback in terms of language learners and describes washback as “the utilization of external language tests to affect and drive foreign language learning in the school context” (p. 513).

All of the above definitions agree that washback refers to the extent to which tests affect language teachers and students to act in a way that they would not normally act if they did not have a test. However, Messick (1996) adds to this understanding another dimension, which is teachers and learners do things they would not usually do, which can either benefit or inhibit the language learning process. Messick (1996) defines and concludes that washback is not simply good or bad teaching or learning practice that might occur with or without the test, but rather good or bad practice that is evidentially linked to the introduction and use of the test” (p.254).

### **3.9.1 Positive and Negative Washback**

In the literature, washback usually has a bad connotation (Ali, 2014). While the fact remains that it is neutral (ibid). The literature differentiates between two types of washback: negative and positive. Brown (2002, p.3) explains that negative washback refers to the “mismatch between the construct definition and the test, or between the content (e.g., material/ abilities being taught) and the test”. For example, I remember that when I was a teacher, I was pushed by students to give more attention and focus in the classroom towards reading and listening rather than speaking and writing skills. This was because only reading and listening were examined in both summative tests available in the institution. This resulted in the neglect of writing and speaking skills as they were neither given the time in the classroom nor textbooks were fully utilised. Such practice is known as negative washback of tests in the classroom. According to Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996), washback can also affect the learners’ scores in tests by increasing them without an accompanying raise in the ability being tested. Thus, negative washback is one of the reasons for grade inflation –also called *test score pollution*.

On the other hand, Bachman (1990) explains that positive washback takes place when the skills and abilities taught to students were presented as part of the testing

procedure. This means that all of the classroom activities, lessons, and the content of textbooks have a role of preparing the students to conquer the examinations. In the same vein, Luxia (2005) argues that high stakes exams have a greater potential to achieve positive washback if they were designed by the policymakers and tests designers with learning objectives in mind.

### **3.10 Teachers' Beliefs**

This study is concerned with English language teachers' beliefs towards language assessment, with particular respect to the ELI of a Saudi university. A great number of recent studies fall in the framework of the notion of teacher cognition, which is based on the hypothesis that students' learning and progress are strongly linked to the professional roles the teachers see themselves in. Based on this, this section investigates the relationship between assessment practices and teachers' beliefs, which, it is hoped, will enrich our understanding of the fundamental principles pertaining to one of the key issues under investigation: teachers' philosophies concerning language assessment.

As stated above, although a considerable amount of research has been dedicated to question the idea of psychometric testing, the fact remains that education stakeholders still need to assess their students' language proficiency and that psychometric testing remains the main tool used to assess students in most educational institutions and exam boards. Furthermore, mainstream teachers are being marginalised from making decisions in the assessment of their students in the Gulf area (Troudi et al., 2009). However, in this Saudi university, and in addition to the assessment committee, teachers in the ELI can dictate assessment procedures that are implemented. Therefore, it is important to understand their beliefs in general and their beliefs about assessment in particular to gain a clearer understanding of their actions as teachers.

In the literature, teachers' beliefs are referred to using a great variety of concepts such as beliefs, perspectives, attitudes, conceptions, perceptions, judgments, personal theories, implicit theories, dispositions, ideologies, opinions or conceptual systems (Pajares, 1992; and Chang, 2005). Most of these above-mentioned concepts are used by researchers when referring to teachers' understanding of

their practices in the classroom, as argued by Clark and Preston (1986) who declare that the thinking process of teachers and how they act in the classroom is informed by a set of personal and individual beliefs, values and principles.

Currently, it is clear for educational researchers that teachers' beliefs have a huge impact on their classroom practices (Farrell & Ives, 2015; and Borko & Putnam, 1996). Such beliefs and knowledge develop as a result of their classroom experiences, first as students and later on as teachers. Therefore, how they act in the classroom is strongly influenced by the way they have been taught in addition to previous experiences as teachers. Sometimes such experiences facilitate and help a teacher while on other occasions they hinder and serve as an obstacle that the teacher needs to overcome. This belief may also impact the way they perceive, design and implement assessment in the class.

Teachers' beliefs are essential for understanding and improving the educational process. For instance, Cheung, Said and Park (2015) clarify that teachers as reflective professionals can achieve their best when they are effective in the approach they decide to adapt and when they act consistently in accordance with their beliefs. However, in regard to assessment, Airasian and Jones (1993, p. 242) characterise teachers' choices as "messy", also claiming that most of the time teachers rely on informal techniques in order to assess the level of their students right at the beginning of each academic year. It could be argued that teachers who are well-prepared in assessment and who are assessment literate are less likely to commit such mistakes.

Other researchers such as Brookhart (1994) reviewed a number of studies and concluded that most of the time teachers consider students' efforts and ability in addition to their actual achievement when assessing and grading them. He adds that teachers, especially high school teachers, highly consider the consequences of grades and take that into consideration when allocating them to the students. Grades are important to both teachers and students and it could therefore be argued that the most effective assessment practices take into consideration the students' efforts and not only how they performed for a particular assessment.

Bliem and Davinroy (1997) produced a report about teachers' beliefs on assessment and instruction in literacy. The authors arrived at several findings in this report. First, they stated that teachers' perspectives and beliefs that separate assessments measure students' outcome on various targets can impact on their utilisation of records and hence, assessment becomes more like an evaluation of fluency. Secondly, the authors found that teachers act irregularly when it comes to implementing assessment techniques and constantly act based on a temporary belief which may be inconsistent throughout the teaching period. Also, the authors highlighted the linkage between instruction and assessment and pointed that reforms should be implemented to bridge the gap between the two.

Song and Koh (2010) conducted a study to assess and understand teachers' beliefs and practices concerning learning assessment. The authors strongly highlight the impact of teachers' beliefs on assessment adequacy. In doing so, they conducted a self-reported questionnaire to understand and measure teacher's beliefs about student learning, particularly through formative assessment practices. They concluded that teachers who think students are active in class, tend to use formative assessment apparatus, such as questioning, and request students' engagement and feedback because they believe students need to be able to evaluate their own performance and understanding of the class material.

In addition to reviewing teachers' perspective, the literature also addresses certain misconceptions teachers may hold about testing. For example, not all teachers believe that they are able to use tests as part of the classroom teaching, which might sometimes prevent them from becoming competent in language testing and assessment. A number of these misconceptions, according to Bachman and Palmer (1996 p.7), are:

- believing that there is one 'best' test for any given situation
- misunderstanding the nature of language testing and language test development
- having unreasonable expectations about what language tests can do and what they should be
- placing blind faith in the technology of measurement

These misconceptions sometimes drive teachers to use inappropriate tests and assessment methods with their students, which can easily lead to the test failing to meet the particular needs of those students. Also, such beliefs can encourage teachers to adopt a specific assessment and testing procedure just because it is becoming very popular in the field of English language teaching. That is to say, teachers' beliefs can be vulnerable to the external environment, which is not necessarily a positive aspect for assessment.

Another negative outcome is that teachers can become frustrated if they cannot produce the so-called 'perfect test'; in some occasions, such frustrations result in teachers losing their faith in developing their own tests and end up relying on others, such as experts, to develop tests for them (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). A test that can be easily solved by all students, or another that cannot be completed on time can bias teachers' beliefs and perspectives and impact their learning assessment choice of tools and efforts.

On the other hand, certain teachers sometimes feel they cannot trust English language tests arguing they hinder the learning process preferring to eliminate language tests altogether. For them, teaching is the primary activity in the classroom and too many tests provide unreliable information. On the other hand, however, Hughes (2003) states that it cannot be denied that information about the ability of an individual to use a language is very useful and, in some cases, even necessary. For example, it is very difficult to imagine British universities accepting overseas students without any knowledge of their level of English. This would lead to chaos and random entry of unqualified students, which is exactly what entry tests attempt to mitigate. This also applies to international Saudi companies seeking to recruit Saudi employees who are able to communicate in English. In the context of this study, the ELI needs to provide different departments and schools with accurate knowledge about the English language ability of the students before they can join their desired schools and departments after studying English during their preparatory year.

All of the previous academic and professional examples need some sort of dependable measures of language ability and proficiency; therefore, the idea of

totally banishing tests may seem unrealistic and not viable. What teachers and teaching professionals should be doing, instead, is working on writing better tests themselves in addition to preparing students for the test. Finally, encouraging professional testers and examination boards to work more on improving their tests is another argument this study wishes to put forward. All of these recommendations may yield more accurate assessment and testing outcomes.

### **3.11 Assessment and the Concept of Feedback**

Assessment closely relates to English language teaching in that teachers use assessment on a daily basis in order to make decisions about what to teach, how to teach it and what to use in teaching it. They make these decisions based on their beliefs of what is best for their students and, in addition to that, the teachers' understanding of English teaching and language development also plays an important role in these decisions. According to Rea-Dickins (2004), when teachers are asked about their assessment practices, they tend to focus more on summative rather than formative assessment in spite of their regular practice of formative assessment on a daily basis, unlike their engagement and involvement in summative assessment. Rea-Dickins also states that "there is a tendency to prioritize the 'formal' and the 'procedural' and to underplay the observation-driven approaches to assessment which is strongly in evidence in their everyday classroom practice" (p.249).

Additionally, Rea-Dickins (2004) also believes that there is a strong relationship between assessment and instruction and the role of the teacher in these processes. She clarifies that the teachers' roles in these practices are gained "through research that has sought to make links between assessment and instruction in terms of authenticity and congruence of assessment practices in relation to a particular program of study" (p.250). Furthermore, according to Brindley (2001) and McNamara (2001), teachers sometimes tend to have problems with their assessment practices due to conflicts of different assessment cultures. In addition, when assessing, they have a difficulty in distinguishing the difference between their role as mentors or facilitators in the classroom and their role as judges or assessors of the students' language performance.

In order for the teacher to perform well as an assessor he/she needs to be able to give appropriate feedback to students. Therefore, it seems essential to address the concept of *feedback* in this literature review. It should be noted that, this concept is not limited to higher education or to assessment only as we experience feedback on a regular basis in many aspects of our lives. For example, in normal everyday conversation, feedback is given while someone is speaking in the form of verbal comments such as ‘uh’, ‘yeah’, ‘really’ or actions including smiles, headshakes or grunts that can indicate success or failure in communication. Another example is at work when someone is being praised or even at home when parents use feedback on a daily basis with their children.

Richards and Schmidt (2010) clarify that in the context of teaching “feedback refers to comments or other information that learners receive concerning their success on learning tasks or tests, either from the teacher or other persons” (p.217). This definition could be questionable because it limits feedback to positive feedback, while in reality, teachers’ feedback can sometimes result in negative effects on the students and their learning. The previous definition does not refer to written feedback, which in the ELI, teachers regularly provide students with especially for the writing component. Irons (2007) argues that the quality and timing of feedback given to students is a very important aspect of the learning process in addition to the relationship with the teacher. Feedback also plays an important role in assessment and it is crucial in order to enable students to benefit and learn from assessment.

### **3.12 Teachers’ Role in Assessment**

When it comes to language assessment, test developers and specialists usually have an influential role and voice in designing assessment procedures and tests. However, classroom teachers have a very limited role or sometimes even no role in the design phase of assessment but rather their perceived role has been limited to administer those assessment practices or tests in the classroom (Graves, 1996; and Shohamy, 2001). Currently, there is a growing tendency to involve other stakeholders such as the teachers in test design and development (Shohamy, 2001; and Troudi et al., 2009).

According to Lambert and Lines (2001) the formative role of assessment is to provide teachers with feedback on progress in order to support future teaching and learning. However, this study is more interested in the role of the teacher in the assessment practices available in his/her place of work. Shohamy (2006, p.87) argues that this role is usually marginalised and states that “[i]n most cases, teachers are viewed as bureaucrats; they are being used by those in authority to carry out testing policies and thus become servants of the system”. However, carrying out and administering tests is not a simple process. Fulcher (2010) describes how test administration is a huge responsibility for teachers as they have to design the test and produce multiple designs in order to be used on the exam day. In certain departments, disciplines and large testing settings, conducting tests may require administrative overhead and extensive management by the teacher, in which case, teachers may need to secure sufficient copies of each test version and ensure that they are distributed correctly to the test takers. Proctoring exams may also be complicated and require a great deal of coordination and supervision. Guaranteeing the security and confidentiality of tests is also the responsibility of the teachers, which can sometimes include the transportation of materials to the test venue. In some cases, teachers also have to make sure that the test venue is suitable for the exam by, for example, making sure that the room temperature is suitable, that all the CD players are in working order, that lighting is sufficient in the rooms and also ensuring the desks are placed correctly to minimise the chances of cheating. In addition to the responsibility of arranging and scheduling invigilators to help on the day of the test, teachers need to check the identity of each of the test takers and work out a mechanism to do that efficiently. Access to students with disabilities or students that need special assistance may also need to be coordinated by the teacher. All in all, the testing process may be so complicated that the teacher may be overwhelmed and confused as to what exactly their responsibilities are, in relation to other academic administrators in the testing venue or the school.

Recent advances in technology have also been employed to help teachers and administrators though this may well have added complexity, especially to less technically savvy teachers. The field of electronic assessment, or *e-assessment*,



has gained wide academic attention in past decades. E-assessment refers to the use of information technology (IT) to deliver exams. Many international exams such as the TEOFL and IELTS, now use various IT-based technologies to test individuals.

Fulcher (2010) sums up this idea by stating that “it is a complex planning process” (p.253). Here, I argue that all of the previous responsibilities should not be the reason to exclude teachers from other valuable roles in designing and developing assessment procedures in their workplace. Stiggins (2004) also argues that there's a common mistaken belief that “teachers and administrators don't need to know about and understand the principles of sound assessment practice the professional testing people will take care of that for us” (p.26). He continues stating that usually in teacher training programmes, teachers are not well-prepared to assess their students accurately and that institutions make an effort to exclude them from testing and assessment. He claims that over the past sixty years, school leaders and teachers were not being trusted to accurately assess their students as the society usually demands that third-party, considered more objective, assess the students in order to avoid any alteration of the scores that the teachers might impose in favour of their students. The idea of teachers' limited knowledge about assessment, also known as *assessment literacy*, is an issue of concern that has been discussed in the literature as well as the issue of teacher preparation programmes not giving enough attention to assessment (Christie, Devlin, Freebody, Luke, Martin & Threadgold, 1991; Louden, Rohl, Gore, McIntosh, Greaves, & Wright, 2005; and Coombe et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, the lack of extensive research on the role of teachers in terms of assessment is evident and supported by a great number of academic studies, including, for instance, the work by Troudi et al. (2009) in Kuwait and the United Arabic Emirates regions that have started to attract renewed attention by regional and global researchers. Teachers' understanding of assessment and their position remain under-explored; however, Coombe et al. (2012), in this particular study, utilised qualitative approaches to examine the role of EFL teachers in assessment in these two countries. The authors used open-ended questionnaires and found that teachers' knowledge of language learning impacted on their views on

assessment. Furthermore, and more importantly, the administrative hierarchy in the examined institution, which can often be described as bureaucratic, can limit the teachers' role in assessment.

Stiggins (2004, p.26) adds “[w]e told teachers to teach and not to worry about assessment: someone else will cover that. In addition, we likewise told assessment people: you test and you don’t need to know anything about teaching”. This resulted in building a wall between people who assess the students and the teachers themselves. It also resulted in two issues: (1) a lack of understanding of both assessment and instruction and (2) by ignoring to include assessment training into their training curriculum, it resulted in teacher training programmes that fail to prepare teachers to assess their students accurately. Stiggins (2004) continues stating that ongoing professional development programmes also failed to prepare teachers with the knowledge they need to conduct assessment practices effectively. Unfortunately, such programmes sometimes try to disguise the problem by providing the teachers with ‘ready-made’ tests, which are usually developed disregarding the actual teaching and the various students’ needs. In other cases, the teachers themselves try to develop their own assessment procedures; however, because teachers are not trained to do so, the tests are sometimes inaccurate and with a considerable amount of mistakes.

Stiggins (2004) proposed several solutions to this issue arguing that teachers should have adequate knowledge of sound assessment practices thereby enabling them to assess their students accurately and efficiently. He states that teacher training programmes should prepare teachers for assessment by involving them in assessment-related activities. Teachers need to be assessment literate thereby understanding the principles of sound assessment. In addition to that, they should remain up-to-date with issues pertaining to assessment through continuous professional development. By gaining such skills, teachers can make more informed choices in their classroom on a day-to-day basis. Sangster and Overall (2006) also argue that teachers need to be more involved in the assessment process by being concerned about a variety of needs, such as, for example, the demands of outside agencies that would require an ongoing status of the students’ progress. In this regard, it is worth noting here that, with respect to this study, such

agencies are similar to the different departments and schools within the university. In addition to that, teachers need to maintain an ongoing assessment model that benefits the students themselves and their learning, which is described in the literature as continuous and summative assessment.

Irons (2007) argues that there is too much emphasis on summative assessment in higher education and that the learning environment needs to shift away from testing and the judgmental culture associated with summative assessment. Another stakeholder that needs to be taken under consideration when developing and administering assessment is the student. Students' self-assessment, for instance, has been found to increase academic performance and achievement as supported by Black and William (1998) and White and Frederiksen (1998).

Rolheisier and Ross (2001) reviewed the potential impact of students' self-evaluation on student performance and noted that teachers with the ability to encourage students' self-evaluation and peer assessment are more successful in managing and accessing a class in addition to the traditional skills of managing tests and examinations. Although students' self-assessment cannot provide what is needed to assign grades, it can definitely encourage students' involvement and participation. Therefore, Rolheisier and Ross (2001) presented a theoretical model behind self-evaluation arguing that such model may help students set higher goals for themselves, commit more personal efforts to demonstrate a competitive performance among others, encourage self-judgement and stimulate self-thought and contemplation. I would like to argue that allowing students to take responsibility and ownership of their learning involves encouraging dialogue between them and their teachers as well as among themselves to enhance their overall learning experience.

### **3.13 Critical Language Testing**

In the ELI, tests are often the main concern of students; however, they should not be blamed for not succeeding in their exams, nor should they be withdrawn from further education solely based on weak test performance as this, of course, has a huge impact on their future as previously mentioned in chapter 2. Therefore, the test constitutes a powerful tool in this educational environment at my university. In

a wider sense, tests are also considered one of the main factors affecting and manipulating language behaviours in the Saudi Arabian society. This is supported by Shohamy (2001) and Broadfoot (1996) who believe that tests can be regarded as social and political instruments that have a strong impact on students, teachers, parents and society as a whole.

Critical language testing (CLT) is part of the developing area of Critical Applied Linguistics and mainly aims to tame this powerful beast –i.e. tests– by monitoring this power, examining the strategies used to develop these test, the consequences they may have as well as their negative impact. Another important aim is giving some of this power to the test takers themselves (Shohamy, 2001). Pennycook (1994) and Kramsch (1993) established the following principles by highlighting that CLT claims that the act of language testing is, in fact, a product of cultural, social, political, educational and ideological agendas that shaped the lives of individual participants, teachers and learners thereby arguing that language testing is not neutral. It also aims to enable test takers to develop a critical review of the test in addition to acting upon it by questioning and critiquing a value, which is inherited in the tests. CLT also considers test takers as political individuals in a political context while tests are considered as tools that are related to success in a culture where educational and political issues are in a struggle with each other. It questions the agendas behind tests and investigates whose agendas they are and at the same time encourages people administering the test to question the vision of society these tests are creating. In addition to that, CLT encourages questioning the objectives and actual uses of tests; it also questions whether tests assess and measure knowledge or are misused to define and dictate knowledge. CLT also aims to consider all stakeholders in the test and examines if all test development and production is solely in the hands of the testers; alternatively, it is a production of collaboration between all the stakeholders, which include teachers, parents, test writers, and policymakers. CLT argues that testers do not have complete knowledge of testing; they need to get support in order to increase their accuracy and validate their understanding of knowledge. CLT regards interpretive traditions as a more reliable source than psychometric traditions in testing meaning that test scores can be interpreted in different ways and multiple correct answers can exist.

Another strong point of CLT is that it investigates the meaning of test scores and argues that they are not absolute and can be questioned and discussed. At the same time challenging tests as the only instrument for assessing knowledge. It advocates for multiple assessment procedures working together in order to get a better understanding of each individual's knowledge of language (McNamara, 2001).

All of the above issues broadly challenge common beliefs about testing and assessment in the field of English language teaching as a great number of widespread beliefs about tests and assessment are unfounded and unsupported. The view that tests assess learners' objectivity and fairness has been questioned by critical perspectives on English language testing. Most common beliefs are being challenged by a growing body of research within the domain of CLT (see for example, Messick 1996; Davies 1997; Lynch 2001; Shohamy 2001, 2006; and McNamara & Roever, 2006).

These studies have examined the political and social implications of tests, arguing that tests are being used for hidden agendas and corporate purposes and not for the purpose of measuring knowledge. They argue that tests are a political tool to affect educational systems while sometimes acting as gatekeepers to exclude a specific group of unwanted people. Moreover, tests sometimes have detrimental effects on learning by limiting the learning experience to specific curriculum issues that are more likely to be handled in the tests. Shohamy (2006) clarifies that "in recent years, tests have been viewed not only as pedagogical tools, but especially as social and political instruments that have a strong impact on education and can determine social order" (p. 93). Thus, when tests are used, two stories can be told: the official and the real story. Usually, the official story tells that tests are used for measuring knowledge or for educational purposes while the real story tells that tests are sometimes conducted to achieve other objectives such as teachers sometimes using them as disciplinary tools (Shohamy, 2001). She also argues that certain questions need to be asked when any test is introduced:

1. Why is the test being given in the first place?
2. What is the agenda behind the introduction of the test?

3. What are the politics of the test?
4. Who is going to gain or who is going to lose?
5. What is the political motive behind the test?
6. What are the relationships among the different bodies that administered the test?
7. How will the results be used?
8. How would the test affect teaching?
9. What does the test mean for the test takers, parents and schools?
10. What are the long and short-range consequences of the test for the lives of the individuals?
11. What does the test do to the knowledge being assessed?
12. Critical testing within the field of critical pedagogy aims at empowering the test takers.

It could be argued that if English language teachers and other assessment stakeholders keep the above questions in mind, this would definitely help in raising their awareness of the assessment process. This, in turn, will encourage teachers to question and critique assessment practices in which professionals are engaged. Although tests are powerful tools embedded in social contexts with various agendas, critical language testing allows us to think of alternative interpretations and values placed the field of testing.

In relevance to the key subject of this study, assessment, critical language testing advocates the involvement and active participation of all of the stakeholders involved in the assessment process. In the context of this study stakeholders are ELI, students, teachers and STEM departments in the University. CLT advocates that all Stakeholders should all have an active role in the design and development of assessment practices in English language teaching institutes (Lynch, 2001). In addition, assessment practices should not belong to a specific stakeholder and it is very important that the rights of test takers are addressed and protected (Shohamy, 2001). Therefore, in this study my understanding of the teachers' role in assessment is partly informed by the principles of CLT. I argue for the empowerment of teachers through better assessment literacy and involvement of teachers in the assessment decisions in the ELI.

### **3.14 Summary**

This chapter presented an extensive review of the literature relating to assessment by first discussing the definitions of the key notion of assessment and then outlining three main types, namely formative, continuous and summative assessments. The chapter shed more light on the history of English language testing in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the above chapter discussed the issue of psychometric testing, its advantages, model and criticism. The notions of teachers' belief and their role in assessment were also highlighted and critical language testing principles were dealt with. Thus existing qualitative research on teachers' roles is lacking in the field of language assessment, especially in the Gulf area, which this research seeks to address in the following chapters.

## Chapter Four: Research Design & Data Analysis

This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative research methods employed for investigating the roles, and beliefs of university language teachers towards language assessment practices in the ELI as well as the design of the study and philosophical approach taken. A detailed description of the research process will be provided. The two key research questions are:

1. What are the role(s) of the ELI teachers in the language assessment practices in the FYP programme in Saudi Arabia?
2. What are the teachers' understanding of and attitudes towards language assessment and their role in it?

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the role teachers play in assessment, this research used an emergent research design whereby I collected sufficient data about the area under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and adjusted my research plans, depending on what was uncovered as the study progressed (Robson, 2002). I had initially planned to depend solely on collecting data from interviews because, I believe, they provide a good opportunity for the participating teachers to freely reflect on their own roles or even lack of roles. Indeed, according to Hedgcock (2002) and Johnson (1999), reflection is considered one of the best ways to comprehend teachers' perceptions. Then, as the study progressed, I decided to support this instrument by including 'informal member checking' throughout the investigation and also 'formal member checking' as part of the design. This change in the design is recognised in the literature, by Holliday (2002), who advocates that qualitative research becomes stronger if the development of strategy is shaped to suit the scenario being studied.

Due to the fact that I was able to collect data and conduct interviews over a period of three months, I managed to carry out the interviews and analyse them at the same time. This combination between data collection and analysis is recognised as good practice in this type of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Holiday, 2002; and Silverman, 2001). As the data were analysed inductively, many emerging themes revealed that I had to go back and investigate certain issues further with my



participants. This meant that throughout the investigation, certain questions were revised and additional interviews were sometimes needed, especially with the teachers that had been interviewed at the start as, at the time, a number of themes and challenges had not yet derived from the data. Therefore, I conducted some follow-up interviews over the phone.

## **4.1 Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions**

### **4.1.1 Interpretive Research Paradigm**

It is essential for the researcher to understand the theoretical assumptions of the research paradigm adopted because failure to do so will definitely have serious consequences on the whole study (Richards, 2003). Due to the explorative nature of this study and its context, it was felt that the interpretive research paradigm was the best paradigm to adopt. It is worth noting that the 'interpretive research paradigm' is known in the literature under different terminologies, including naturalistic, constructivist, and qualitative (Ericsson, 1986; Ernest, 1994; and Robson, 2002).

However, before getting into details on the specific methods used for this research, it is important to clarify what is meant by the term *interpretive research* here as this will help in clarifying its suitability for this study. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), knowledge in this paradigm is viewed as being socially constructed and endorses multiple realities and eclecticism. This means that the existence of opposite or conflicting conceptions is considered a beneficial way to gain a greater understanding of humans and the world they live within (ibid). This paradigm proved suitable for this study as the ELI teachers interviewed had very different and sometimes conflicting views and beliefs concerning assessment. Rubin and Rubin (1995) argue that an interpretive research journey is quite similar to planning a vacation, where people start with a plan or an itinerary. However, this itinerary is most likely to change during the course of the vacation; as a result, this will create a design that is "flexible, interactive, and continuous" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.43).

Bryman (2008) argues that the interpretive paradigm was born from criticisms of positivism and its unsuitability for the social sciences. Consequently, as this study aims to understand learning and human interactions, such as teachers' beliefs and roles concerning language assessment in a Saudi university, I believe that by adopting an interpretive approach, it will do so without establishing a rigid set of rules for human behaviour. Unlike positivist researchers, I was not observing and viewing the investigated reality from outside, but rather going into the human aspects of the phenomena under investigation.

Bryman (2008) also states that the interpretive paradigm "is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (p.16). In the current study, teachers in the ELI were invited to reflect on assessment in the light of their shared beliefs, perceptions, background and culture of the Saudi community in which they live and comply with what is socially acceptable and what is not. Moreover, they commonly interact with each other while sharing unique different experiences; therefore, their values and beliefs concerning assessment can be generally regarded as under the umbrella of the universities policies and procedures. Because if they were not. They might be considered as socially irrelevant and epistemologically unacceptable for the ELI community or this study.

#### **4.1.2 Ontological Assumptions**

According to Crotty (1998), the definition of ontology is "the study of being. It is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such" (p.10). To further clarify this point, ontological assumptions relate to the questions: "what is there that can be known?" or "what is the nature of reality?" (Guba & Lincoln 1989, p.83). From a scientific positive prospective the above issues can be investigated by using experiments which will usually determine what can be revealed and defined (Ernest, 1994). However, for this research, it is assumed that the world being investigated is a world populated by people who have different ideas, thoughts and understandings about it.

In terms of ontology, the interpretive paradigm followed in this study is the philosophical view of idealism (Walliman, 2006), which assumes that the world exists according to our understanding of it and that nothing has meaning without human consciousness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; and Walliman, 2006). In other words, it is humans who attach differing sets of meanings and classifications to the world (Robson, 2002), which implies that reality is a product of social interaction and, at the same time, revised and changed continually.

In this study, being myself a teacher of the ELI, where the research was conducted, I might have similar experiences as other colleagues I interviewed. However, from an ontological standpoint, this does not mean that we all share the same beliefs and thus constitute one reality. This is due to the fact that different people have different interpretive frameworks and all individuals filter the experiences they encounter differently. Although they might have similar views, each one of them will deal with a classroom situation in a unique manner, depending on their personal circumstances, experience or qualification. In the same way, teachers hold different views and understandings; therefore, this study was conducted bearing in mind different and multiple realities.

Teachers' beliefs concerning language assessment, therefore, are only formed after being influenced by various experiences encountered in their previous life as well as in the institution. Such beliefs are experiential in nature with social roots and can only be justified by the minds that create them. As different teachers form different relative realities, thereby, teachers in my institution don't share one reality but rather several of them. Such realities are formed because they lived different experiences and faced unique encounters. This ontological stance is known as *relativism* and it regards reality as subjective and socially constructed. Therefore, in this study the teachers' beliefs do not exist independently of teachers' reasoning, but can only be captured and presented with subjective influences, as clarified in more detail in the next section.

#### **4.1.3 Epistemological Assumptions**

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. What is to be counted as 'knowledge' and what is not. Crotty (2003) defines epistemology as "a way of understanding and

explaining how we know what we know” (p.3). Wellington (2000) suggests a more general definition: “the study of the nature and validity of human knowledge” (p.196). Because traditional testing aims at measuring linguistic knowledge as accurately as possible (Shohamy, 2001), the positivist paradigm informs most of the research conducted on language assessment in the Gulf in general and in the KSA in particular. However, this study seeks to investigate teachers’ roles in assessment based on interpretive, socio-cultural principles thus taking in to account the interaction of the ideological, political, educational, managerial and institutional agendas (Pennycook, 2001; and Shohamy, 2001). Hence, this study is epistemologically rooted in a social constructionist view of knowledge whereby I sought to provide a philosophical ground for deciding what kinds of knowledge “are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Maynard, 1994, p.10). As the interpretive paradigm adopted in this study is considered subjectivist, the researcher and the “enquired are fused into a single (monistic) entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two [of them]” (Guba, 1990, p. 27). In other words, the researcher and the participants jointly participate in the knowledge production of this study (Clerke & Hopwood, 2014).

According to Burr (2006), social constructionism is based on the following four principles. Firstly, it insists on taking a critical stance towards our understanding of the world, including ourselves. As it advocates being critical and problematizes conventional ways of understanding the world, it refuses and challenges the idea of conventional knowledge being based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world we live in. Secondly, it also argues that our understanding of the world is culturally and historically specific. Thirdly, it considers knowledge –which is a product of regular interactions between people– as fabricated. Thus, it is largely interested in language because it is a product of daily social interactions. Fourthly, and finally, it suggests that continuous social interaction with the world will produce unique responses from humans.

If the above principles are adopted as criteria, when developing assessment in my institution, this might help the teachers collaboratively design an evaluation programme that includes all stakeholders in this university context. This, in turn,

will give more weight, validity, and reliability to all assessment practices available in the institution, both summative and formative.

Knowledge is viewed as being socially constructed in the interpretive paradigm (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In the same way, the social constructionist stance of this study implies that teachers develop assessments and tests from different philosophical and sociological perspectives, thereby giving great importance to community consensus in determining the knowledge used for designing assessment. This view is derived from the belief that individuals understand the world according to shared beliefs and perceptions of their own community (Clark, Bamberg, Bowden, Edlund, Gerrard, Griswold, & Williams, 2011). This means that teachers' culture, backgrounds and perceptions all play an important role in their beliefs. This is expressed in this study on language assessment which, among other issues, argues that if teachers designed and produced assessments without any regards to the above-mentioned perspectives, students may feel that the tests are socially irrelevant to them and they may be considered unacceptable by the university.

## **4.2 Research Methodology**

According to Crotty (1998), methodology is “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (p.3). Therefore, the methodology aims to describe, evaluate and justify the use of specific methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). To achieve this, it was felt that an exploratory methodology would be best suited to explore the area of assessment as it enabled me to capture a broad range of views from the teachers about their actual roles in assessment from their own perspective. This methodology also enabled the researcher to identify the current challenges that teachers face in this area.

In every study, researchers should adopt a methodology and try to implement all of its principles, concepts, notions and techniques (Grix, 2004). In addition, according to Crotty (1998), every researcher needs to justify why they decided to adopt a specific methodology. Because the methodology followed in this study was exploratory in nature, the researcher tried to thoroughly probe the phenomenon

under investigation as it was hoped this would result in detailed insights into teachers' beliefs and roles in terms of language assessment. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), this approach enables the researcher to explain why things happen from the viewpoint of the insiders (in this case the teachers of the ELI).

As the study was exploratory in nature, strong emphasis was placed on collecting rich data in order to provide an in-depth description of teachers' roles and beliefs in assessment. I made sure to treat "the context as it occurs naturalistically and no attempt is made to control the variables operating in the context as these may be the very sources of unexpected or unforeseen interpretations" (Burns, 1999, p. 22). However, it should be noted that the interpretive paradigm adopted in this study views knowledge as being personal, which, therefore encourages my involvement. In the current study, I tried to play an important part in extracting the views and opinions from the participants without attempting to change them. I felt that the interpretive paradigm best served the purpose of the study whereby I only attempted to reveal the teachers' roles and beliefs concerning language assessment. Meanwhile, this research primarily expected to uncover issues pertaining to teachers' roles and beliefs in assessment practices in the ELI, but unexpectedly it also revealed a number of challenges experienced by the teachers.

### **4.3 Interviews**

Interviews are considered the most popular research method for collecting qualitative data (Burns, 1999). Consequently, Interviews were used as a major data collection tool for carrying out this study. According to Bryman (2008), the goal of an interview is to "elicit from the interviewee or respondent" all manner of information: interviewees' own behaviour or that of others; attitudes; norms; beliefs; and values" (p.192). I believe that interviews are a suitable research tool as they not only help in finding out the matters that appear on the surface, but also help the researcher to delve more deeply into the justifications and origins of their beliefs on assessment. Rugg and Petre (2007) also support the use of interviews not only for the same reason, but also because they add another dimension which is flexibility. They also report that interviews do not require restriction in terms of the type or format of questions. Based on this, interviews were a suitable tool for this particular

research because flexibility was important in order to interpret the interviewees' responses and then investigate their responses in greater depth.

However, when using interviews in research, some aspects need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, interviews are usually between two individuals who both bring with them their own background knowledge to the research. Indeed, according to Maxwell (2012), the participants' backgrounds are the foremost important source of insights. Secondly, sometimes interviewers may feel they are taking advantage of the participant as they only maintain the relationship with the participants because they need them for their research. This was avoided in the current study by conducting the interviews with my work colleagues with whom I had good professional relationships prior to conducting this study as well as by stressing that their participation was entirely on a voluntary basis. Best and Khan (1989) hold a different view from Maxwell in that interviews are less demanding on participants as teachers are usually not reluctant to speak about an issue but sometimes very reluctant to put their thoughts and beliefs in writing.

In this research study, I have chosen to use semi-structured interviews because I had only a general idea of the direction of the interview and its possible outcomes. As this was the case for this research, Brown and Dowling (2012) argue that semi-structured interviews are better than structured interviews especially if the researcher wants to reveal the investigated issue from the perspective of the interviewees. In addition, with regard to this research, the semi-structured interview was used for the following reasons listed by Wisker (2001):

- **It addresses the need for comparable responses:** subjects interviewed for this research need to be asked the same questions. Therefore, if unstructured interviews were used, the researcher would not have the opportunity to ask the same questions, as each interview would develop differently and there would be no room to compare data among different subjects.
- **The need to go in-depth with the interviewee's responses:** the researcher is not after specific limited answers from the subjects. For example, they are going to need to go in-depth with the teachers' answers.

If only structured interviews were used, it is very likely that the chance of going into detailed answers would disappear.

By addressing the above-mentioned issues, the interview protocol was designed in a way that addressed the research questions. Many of the interview questions were open ended in order to enable my participants to elaborate on an issue freely without any restrictions or worry for the interviewer's interest (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). By doing this, my research questions were addressed and rich data were gathered from my participants.

Dornyei (2007) provided a description of the skeleton structure of a semi-structured interview and stated that "the interviewer will ask the same questions of all the participants, although not necessarily in the same order or wording, and would supplement the main questions with various probes" (p.136). Using semi structured interviews meant that I was able to determine which questions I wanted to ask during the interview as well as form any additional questions I felt would be useful for further elaboration (Robson, 2002). It is noteworthy to mention that I kept aware of the research questions even during the interview. However, the sequence of the questioning depended on the development of the teacher's responses. All the interviews started with general questions about the teachers' academic background and country in order to avoid any leading questions. I also told my participants that there were no right or wrong answers to my questions to ensure that they gave responses truly and freely, assuring them that "they cannot be wrong" Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p. 32).

All the interviews were conducted in English, as all my participants were English language teachers, fluent in English. It is quite normal in the ELI to find teachers talking to each other in English as teachers come from countries with different linguistic backgrounds. Radnor (2001) mentions that conducting an interview using a language that is understood and comfortable to use by both participants is considered ideal. I conducted the first set of interviews in August 2013 and the second set took place in November of the same year. Each interview was divided into two parts: the first part contained questions that were investigating the interviewees' perceptions of their role in English language assessment practices in



the ELI while the second part attempted to uncover their beliefs concerning language assessment in general and in the ELI in particular. Both parts were informed by the research questions in addition to the initial literature review. It should be noted that the order of the questions was unique in each interview because I wanted the interview to develop naturally and not too rigidly.

All interviews were conducted fairly smoothly as the interviewees enjoyed having their voice and their views heard even solely for research purposes. However, many of them wanted me to present my findings to the institution as a way to get their voices heard by the administration. On many occasions, I reflected back to the teachers' professional and academic backgrounds to encourage them to elaborate and give more information and details. Then, at the end of each interview, the participants were asked if they wanted to add anything that they felt I had not asked about, or if they had any additional information or points they wanted to add to any of the previous issues we had discussed during the interview. Most of the teachers mentioned several additional issues and challenges they faced while others expanded on issues previously discussed. At a later stage, and in order to verify the collected data, each interview transcript was emailed to the interviewee who checked it and then returned it back to me with amendments and minor corrections.

After gaining permission from each respondent, all interviews were digitally recorded. Recording interviews is favoured above note-taking or just relying on memory and also affects the credibility of the study (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Researchers such as, Creswell (2013) and Silverman (2011) cautioned that the use of recording devices might affect what people say or how they say it. At the same time, they acknowledge that the participants are aware that researchers use what they say to inform their research. Nonetheless, recording interviews was essential for this study as I needed to focus not only on what the researchers said, but also on how they said it (Brown & Dowling, 2012). Recording the interviews really helped in maintaining eye contact with the interviewees, which made them feel more relaxed and interested in continuing the interview. This also helped to preserve the exact terms and vocabulary used by each interviewee (Oppenheim,

1992). Finally, transcribing the interviews also enabled me to examine them at any point of this study (See Appendix 1 for a sample of a fully transcribed interview).

#### **4.4 Interview Participants and Sampling**

Determining what type of sampling to use is an important step in any research (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). This research opted for the use of the purposeful non-probability sampling (Bryman, 2008; and Creswell, 2013) and teachers were selected according to two criteria: purposiveness and accessibility (Silverman, 2001). In other words, participants were chosen according to the characteristics they hold in order to best serve my research objectives (Wellington, 2000). In addition, the chosen participants were willing to openly share information regarding my research. In the context of this study access to male teachers was possible and easy; however, access to female teachers was only available over the telephone due to cultural restrictions as education in Saudi Arabia is gender segregated. As Shaw (1994) advocates, methodologies should be sensitive to culture; this has resulted in a quite limited number of female teachers interviewed. However, it should be noted that in addition to adequate planning, it was important to maintain a certain flexibility with respect to the sample that slightly changed during the investigation (Marshall & Roseman, 2010). Some of the participants withdrew from the study due to personal reasons while others preferred not to participate due to, as they perceived it, the sensitive nature of the issue of assessment.

The participants of this study included seventeen male and three female English language teachers all working in the ELI from both campuses; all the teachers were familiar or involved in the assessment procedures within the institution. I interviewed expatriate teachers as well as Saudis and participants fall under two categories of male and female teachers. With regards the male teachers, participants were from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, India, Pakistan and England while the female teachers I interviewed were from Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Egypt. All the participants were involved in teaching and in continuous assessment of the FYP students in the ELI a range of teaching experience varying from four to thirteen years in the institution. It was decided to

collect the data from both male and female teachers in order to get rich and diverse data from this investigation. When quoting the participants, I refer to them using pseudonyms that were allocated to them randomly as detailed in the following Table 2:

**Table 2 Participant Demographic Data**

#	Pseudonym	Gender	Country	Years Teaching
1	Wadee	Male	Expatriate	7
2	Raj		Expatriate	8
3	Iqbal		Expatriate	3
4	Saeed		Expatriate	4
5	Haroon		Expatriate	4
6	Moussa		Expatriate	5
7	Ali		Saudi	4
8	Khan		Expatriate	8
9	Medhat		Expatriate	7
10	Abdul		Saudi	7
11	Jamal		Expatriate	6
12	Farooq		Saudi	5
13	Solomon		Expatriate	8
14	Smith		Expatriate	10
15	Ahmad		Expatriate	9
16	Rami		Expatriate	3
17	Zohir		Saudi	5
18	Soad	Female	Saudi	3
19	Eman		Expatriate	6
20	Afnan		Saudi	4

## 4.5 Interview Trials and Adjustment

Because interviews were employed as the main data collection tool, I made sure to pilot them properly before starting the actual interviews. Conducting a pilot test

helped in determining any potential flaws, limitations or other weaknesses in the interview design in addition to giving me an opportunity to make any necessary revisions prior to the implementation of the study (Kvale, 2007). According to Turner (2010), “a pilot test should be conducted with participants that have similar interests as those that will participate in the implemented study” (p.757). This meant it was important to seek the support of three of my doctoral colleagues who were available in the United Kingdom to conduct face-to-face mock interviews.

Having done that, I had the opportunity to fix and edit my interview questions thoroughly before starting my actual interviews with the ELI teachers. Following this piloting stage, a number of redundant questions were removed while others were changed to avoid leading the participants. For example, my initial interviews were criticised by my two supervisors and by pilot participants for being too descriptive; some of the questions were not clear and leading or loaded (See Appendix 2). These issues were addressed and a revised version of the questions was used (See Appendix 3). Following the pilot study, the interview protocol was presented to both of my supervisors for final amendments and approval. The remaining procedures are explained in the next section.

## **4.6 Research Procedures**

Having first gained approval from my sponsors to conduct the study, upon arriving to Saudi Arabia I met with the Dean of the ELI to inform him that the interview process would commence with the teachers and he provided me with an office where I could conduct the interviews. After that, I contacted each participant either by telephone or through direct contact in their office to agree on a suitable specific time and date. Water and refreshments were provided in order to ensure that the teachers felt comfortable and relaxed during the interview. Interviews lasted between one hour to one hour and a half after which, I escorted the teachers to their cars/offices where we sometimes had informal conversations about assessment. On many occasions, I took notes on issues discussed during these “informal interviews” (Ruane, 2016, p. 218) as certain interesting topics revealed themselves after the formal interview. During my time at the institution, I had a great number of conversations and discussions about different educational issues

and the teachers made me feel very welcomed and relaxed. Everyone was extremely polite and generous and offered their time to help me in any way they could.

## 4.7 Data Management & Analysis

In qualitative research, the data collected are usually “a large, cumbersome database because of its reliance on prose in the form of such media as field notes, interview transcripts, or documents” (Bryman 2008, p. 538). This huge amount of data can sometimes result in the researcher avoiding a thorough and appropriate analysis. Merriam (1998, p.178) sets the principles of data analysis as following:

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data. Making sense of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read -it is the process of making meaning.

As this is qualitative, interpretive research, a *thematic analysis approach* was adopted for this study. Although this approach has been criticised of being only a tool or skill used across a range of qualitative methods (Boyatzis, 1998; and Ryan & Bernard, 2000), in the last ten years this approach has been “recognised as a qualitative research method in its own right” (Willig, 2008, p.179). Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, p.68) explained that a *thematic analysis approach* entitles “a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon [under investigation]”. As this approach to data analysis is not restricted to a particular theoretical approach to qualitative research, I needed to identify what exactly the themes in my analysis to represent (Willig, 2008). This representation was guided by my two research questions in addition to the epistemological point of view of the study. However, Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.140) elaborate further by stating that “data analysis in qualitative research is a different part as it requires thinking and reasoning, rather than mechanical and technical process. It is an inductive process”.

Based on these premises, the initial process of data analysis started immediately after the pilot study. Indeed, the three pilot interviews were transcribed and during the interviews, although they were recorded, I took notes wrote comments about

anything I considered relevant. As explained previously in Section 4.5, the interviewees' comments about the clarity of certain questions were taken into consideration and several items were slightly modified. This also led to dividing the interviews into two parts: the first part discussed how teachers view their role in the English language assessment, while the second part dealt with their beliefs concerning language assessment in the institution.

Upon completing all interviews and returning back to the United Kingdom, I did my utmost to transcribe accurately all the recordings by listening to the interviews several times. I then read several times the transcripts and emailed them to each participant requesting them to read them carefully and send them back with any comments or corrections they might have. Most participants did not make any significant changes other than correcting minor spelling and grammar mistakes in the transcripts. Three participants added certain points, but did not actually change what they had said during the interview.

Upon analysing the data, each interview transcript was examined carefully for relationships between the different parts of the data. The interview transcripts were then coded and different categories were derived (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The first stage of the coding process was done on paper by highlighting different ideas that derived from the data. This led to developing different mind maps that enabled me to arrive at all the different themes and categories and make sense of the huge amount of data accumulated (See Appendix 4). Subsequently, the MAXQDA software proved highly useful for the process of allocating each piece of the data or quote to its specific category. This programme also helped in organising the data as well as searching for specific themes:

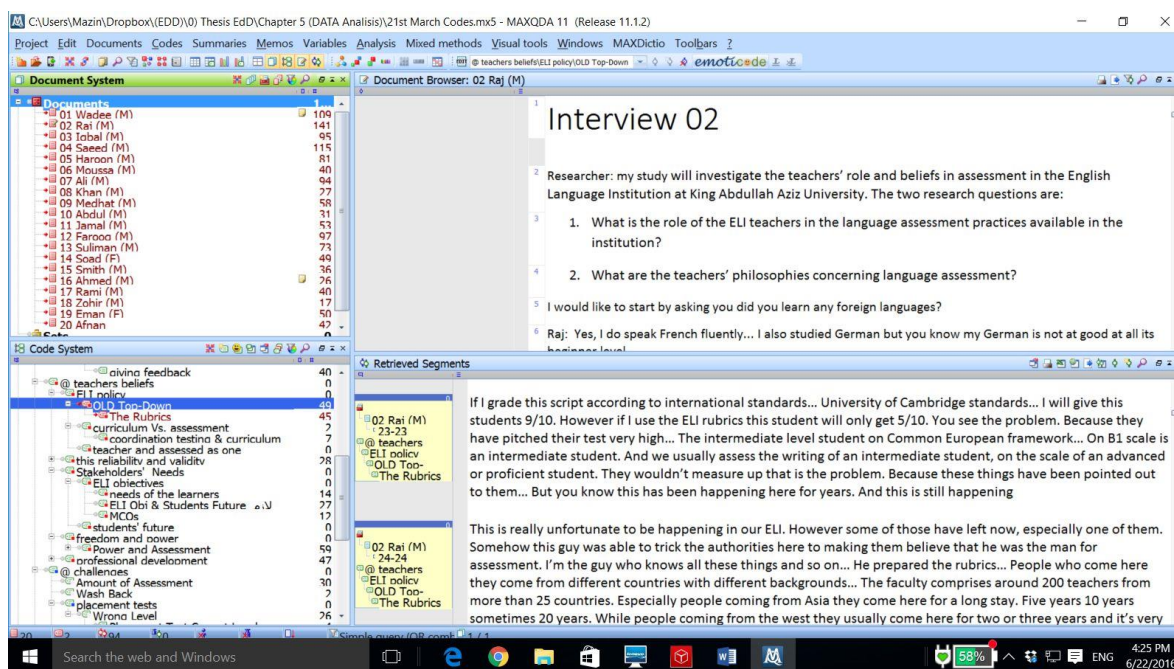


Figure 2 General Overview of Coding Using MAXQDA 11

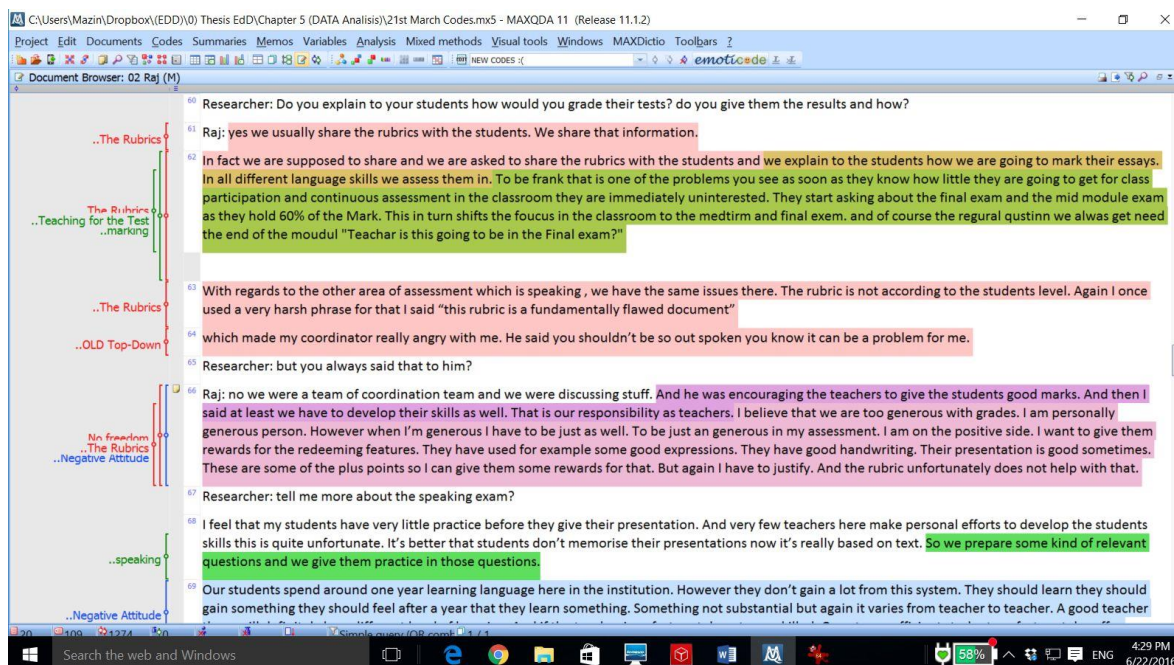


Figure 3 Example of Coded Interview Using MAXQDA 11

This tool also proved its utility because many of the quotes and codes could be entered under several different categories. The data were grouped under three major themes: teachers' roles, teachers' beliefs and challenges. The codes from the transcribed interview were put in a table to show how they cluster into categories and how the categories became the final themes. A sample of one sub-theme is presented below (Table 3) with the full theme presented in Appendix 5:



Table 3 Sample of Data Analysis Stages

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	
Quotes	Codes	Categories	Sub Theme	Theme
<p><b>Document: 01 Wadee (M)</b>  <b>Position: 33 - 33</b>  ... of course not all teachers are involved in designing tests in the institution. Only the teachers work in the assessment committee have a saying in the test format and questions. You have to keep in mind that all of the questions have to be multiple-choice questions.</p> <p><b>Document: 01 Wadee (M)</b>  <b>Position: 98 - 98</b>  my role did change over the past few years. I remember that I was more involved in the assessment by preparing exams and actually choosing the way to assess my students. I mean in the past the teacher could teach we had a lot of power and flexibility...</p> <p><b>Document: 03 Iqbal (M)</b>  <b>Position: 69 - 69</b>  when it comes to designing the test I believe teachers have a small role in that. Tests are initially designed by the assessment committee and then given to us as teachers to administer them with the students.</p> <p><b>Document: 04 Saeed (M)</b>  <b>Position: 254 - 257</b>  as I told you before these tests are done by the assessment committee people. I heard that sometimes they would make teachers take the tests and then give them feedback and comments.</p> <p><b>Document: 20 Afnan</b>  <b>Position: 16 - 16</b>  teachers don't have a role in preparing any of the tests</p>	<p><b>Non-involvement in test design</b></p> <p><b>History of teachers' role in test design</b></p> <p><b>No role in test design</b></p> <p><b>The role is limited to the assessment committee</b></p> <p><b>No role in test design</b></p>	<p><b>Test design and summative assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles in summative assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles</b></p>

## **4.8 Research Trustworthiness**

As the study adopted a qualitative research approach, it was important to implement a set of criteria to ensure its quality through establishing 'trustworthiness' or 'authenticity criteria' (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; and Schwandt, 2001). The term *trustworthiness* refers to "a set of criteria advocated by some writers for assessing the quality of qualitative research" (Bryman, 2008, p.700). In the same vein, Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state that trustworthiness in qualitative research is achieved readers are convinced enough to act upon the findings of a research. In addition to that, the procedures followed by the researcher play an important role in the trustworthiness of a study (Johnson & Saville-Troike, 1992). On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that certain researchers argue that trustworthiness in qualitative research can never be proven (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). In this study, I have tried to explain clearly the precautions taken in order to enhance the trustworthiness of my work by presenting below three trustworthiness criteria: credibility, transferability and dependability (ibid).

### **4.8.1 Credibility**

The notion of credibility in research refers to "the methodological procedures and sources used to establish a high level of harmony between the participants' expressions and the researchers' interpretation of them" (Given, 2008, p.138). Robson (2002) adds that in order for a piece of research to be considered credible, researchers need to provide proper justification and detailed information regarding the methods used for collecting data. Therefore, in order to render my research credible, I did my utmost to ensure that the constructed realities in my interpretation of the data matched the constructed realities of my research participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), which was accomplished using three credibility measures: (1) prolonged involvement in the data (2) member checking (3) peer debriefing.

First, maintaining a prolonged involvement in the data collection is a mean of reaching credibility (Robson, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; and Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In this regard, the three months spent for fieldwork in contact with

my participants, conducting interviews and collecting documents from the ELI enabled me to establish a strong rapport with the teachers, most of whom I had worked with previously.

The second measure recommended in qualitative research (Holliday, 2002; and Guba & Lincoln, 1989), involved member checking, that is, “the process whereby researcher provides the people on whom he/she has conducted research with an account of his/her findings” (Bryman, 2008, p.377). After transcribing all the data and conducting a preliminary analysis, I immediately emailed a copy of the transcriptions to each of my participants in order for them to check their interview transcription (Punch, 2013). Having done that, I was persuaded that the realities I established from the interviews and findings actually mirrored the realities perceived by the teachers in the ELI. In addition to that, the feedback I received from them assured me that the transcription of the interviews was accurate and sufficient.

The third and last measure adopted was peer debriefing, which was done through continuously seeking feedback on my research from colleagues who were also doctoral students at the time. Throughout my research, they have always been both supportive and critical regarding my research plan and the initial findings of the pilot study. As mentioned before, this affected a number of interview questions and research plans while contributing greatly to exploring several aspects that I had not considered before (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

#### **4.8.2 Transferability**

The transferability of research findings means that the researcher is responsible for “providing readers with sufficient information on the case studied such that readers [could] establish the degree of similarity between the case studied and the case to which findings might be transferred” (Schwandt, 2001, p.258). It should be noted that this study is informed by the interpretive paradigm and is not aiming to generate findings that could be used in different contexts. On the contrary, the goal was to highlight the uniqueness of each context by reflecting on the different realities of the research participants concerning language assessment and in an educational context (Holiday, 2003). However, some researchers argue that the

findings of qualitative interpretive research could be transferred to other research contexts that have similar characteristics and participants (Schwandt, 2001; and Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

In this study, I have tried to provide a detailed and adequate description of the following three major characteristics used in order to argue the feasibility of transferring the findings to similar contexts: (1) theoretical sampling, (2) thick description of context and (3) adopted concepts in data analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; and Punch, 2013).

It is perhaps possible that this study's findings about teachers' roles in assessment could be reflected elsewhere in a similar English language institution in any Saudi University. This is because most, if not all, Saudi universities are now teaching and assessing English in their foundation year. Therefore, the results from this study could be transferred to any other Saudi University with similar contexts and settings.

#### **4.8.3 Dependability**

Schwandt (2001, p.258) defines *dependability* as “the inquirer’s responsibility for ensuring that the process of the enquiry was logical, traceable, and documented”. Kirk and Miller (1986) argued that in qualitative research, little attention was given to reliability because of the focus on achieving greater validity. In an effort to ensure dependability, I explained the reasons behind choosing my emergent research design and provided clear justifications for any of the changes that affected the research design during the course of this study. Furthermore, to ensure that my work was dependable, member checking was carried out on all collected data. Although proper triangulation of data sources was not conducted, I argue that through effective ‘member checking’, I have considerably enhanced the trustworthiness of this investigation.

Advocates of triangulation recommend the use of mixed methods in research in an attempt to enhance the validity of research findings and this usually involves using different data collection techniques in the same study (Taylor, 2004). However, by interviewing teachers from seven different nationalities and countries, it could be

argued that some sort of triangulation took place in the form of the diversity of teachers studied. I believe that the use of interviews has enabled me to better capture teachers' roles and beliefs concerning language assessment. This lack of triangulation is also supported by Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.428), who argue that "there can be no single, or articulated truth". Similarly, Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, p.91) state "many qualitative theorists and researchers do not triangulate because they do not believe that there is a single reality that can be triangulated".

## **4.9 Ethical Considerations**

Conducting social research includes collecting data from a variety of individuals and being ethical is considered one of the main conditions for any social research (Wellington, 2000). Based on this premise and given the fact that the area under investigation –assessment– is considered sensitive in any educational context, a number of ethical guidelines were carefully followed to ensure that the participants felt safe and secure when speaking about their roles and beliefs and to guarantee that no harm would reach them.

Before the start of the data collection process, a Certificate of Ethical Research Approval form was submitted to the University of Exeter's ethics committee (See Appendix 6) and approved after the addition of the committee's suggestions and amendments. I was then able to contact my sponsors at the target university in Saudi Arabia with a supporting letter from my supervisor after which final permission was then granted for data collection.

Like Walliman (2005) and Gray (2004), I agree that one of the important aspects in my research was not simply getting the participants' consent, but rather, obtaining their 'informed consent' which allowed the participants to acknowledge that agreement before taking part in the study. In order to do this, I made sure that the informed consent form included clear and simple information about my research. It was also made extremely clear to them that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any time if they chose to do so. I, in addition to each participant, signed two copies of this form: one copy that I kept and another one that was given to the participant (See appendix 7).

My research, like any other social research involving human participants, includes an element of risk to the participants. Awareness of this necessitates strict adherence to a wide range of ethical guidelines and principles (Wellington, 2000; and Stake, 2005). Primarily, the confidentiality of my participants was paramount so all respondents were given random pseudonyms to keep their identity hidden. In addition to that, participants were assured, both verbally and in writing, that I would not disclose any part of the raw data or findings to a third party including supervisors. I also ensured them that no personal information would be divulged in the thesis and that they could withdraw from the research at any point if they wanted to do so. Such important issues are also emphasised by Gray (2004, p.235) who states that “the participants should not be harmed or damaged in anyway by the research”. All consent forms signed by my participants included my contact information to allow them to contact me about the research results in the future, should they wish to.

#### **4.10 Limitations of the Study**

Any research is bound to have limitations. Best and Khan (1989, p.37) state that “limitations are those conditions beyond the control of the researcher that may place restrictions on the conclusions of the study and their application to other situations”. In this section, I indicate my awareness of the boundaries caused by time, the sensitive issue of assessment, and other uncontrolled circumstances. For instance, the fact I was a Saudi national and conducting my research in Saudi Arabia might have made my participants, who are mostly non-Saudis on yearly contracts, cautious and careful when answering my questions. I recognised this and assured them of the confidentiality of whatever they might say in the interviews and took measures to ensure that no harm will come to any of the participants in the study by using pseudonyms for example.

I should mention that interviews with the male teachers ran very smoothly and they were face-to-face. However, my interviews with the female teachers took place over the telephone due to cultural reasons. Transcribing the data from a telephone recording was not as easy as transcribing the data from a regular interview. I tried

my best to transcribe everything however some of the words were unclear in the recordings therefore they were not transcribed.

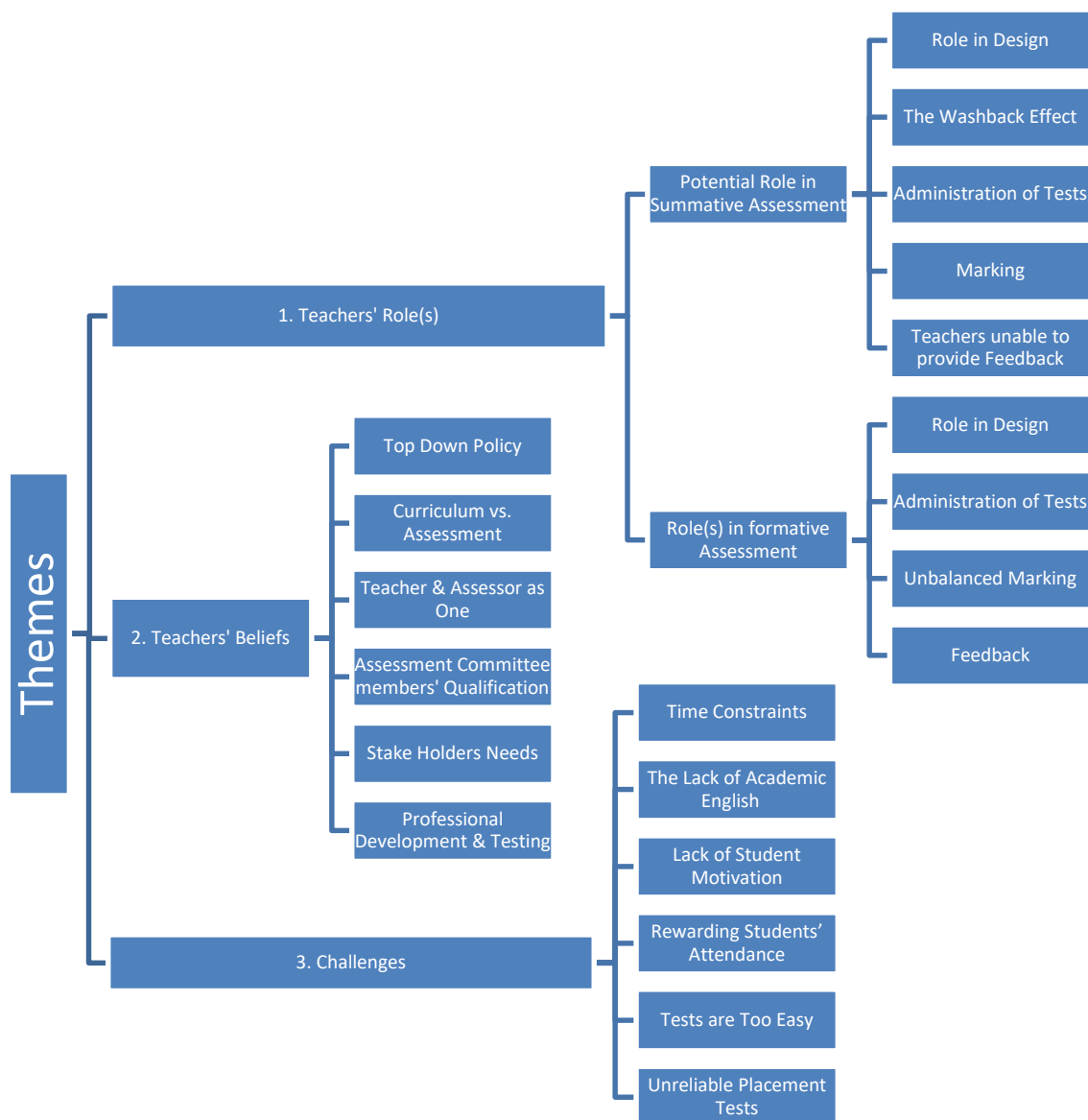
Another obvious limitation was that I only used one research method, semi-structured interviews, in collecting the data from my participants. It would have been really useful to have access to exams and other assessment-related documents since according to Hopkins (2014), they could provide useful insights and understandings of issues that are not available from other sources. It should be noted that the ELI administration made it very clear to me that such documents were considered very classified documents and access to them is limited only to faculty members involved in testing and assessment. Those documents could have helped me in gaining a better understanding of the assessment policies and practices in the ELI and would have also highlighted the nature of the teachers' role and involvement in assessment practices in the institution. In addition, adding a questionnaire might have provided more breadth and could have served to enhance the trustworthiness of my data. However, as my research was trying to reveal the teachers' beliefs through interviews, I felt that using a questionnaire would have made me assume a pre-established set of beliefs of the teachers, which was not the objective of the research. Using only interviews made me understand these beliefs leading to more in-depth questions on their attitudes towards their role in assessment. Moreover, from previous personal experience, teachers in this institution tend to receive a lot of questionnaires and rarely give any attention to them. Finally, the use of questionnaires does not fit into the framework of the study but should, nonetheless, be recognised as a limitation.

#### **4.11 Summary**

In sum, this chapter explored the previously outlined context and the literature review to present a justification for the chosen qualitative approach. It also shed light on the tools used to collect the data while demonstrating ethical considerations of the research. In addition, the data analysis process was explained and examples provided. The following chapter will explore the findings of the study.

## Chapter Five: Findings

This chapter presents a summary of findings that were derived from the data analysis process. The following Figure 4 shows the themes and categories from the data:



**Figure 4 : Themes and categories derived from the data analysis**

As the above figure shows, the first theme that derived from the data revolves around the role(s) of the ELI teachers in language assessment practices in the institution. The participants were asked about their understanding of and attitudes towards their roles in language assessment and their responses were classified –



for data analysis purposes- into two broad categories according to the type of assessment, i.e. summative and continuous. The first category was further divided into five categories: design, teaching for the test, administration, marking, and feedback while the second category was divided into four categories: design, administration, marking, and feedback.

The second theme revolves around the teachers' beliefs with respect to language assessment. Participants were asked about the possible reasons for their role –or absence of role– in assessment as well as their views and attitudes on their role in terms of satisfaction. The reported responses by the participants were again classified into five main categories: ELI policy, teachers' qualifications, learners' needs, issues of teacher freedom & power, and professional development.

Finally, the third emerging theme dealt with the possible challenges facing teachers with regards assessment. They were asked whether the current ELI assessment practices were the source of any particular problems for the teachers or their students. The responses reported by the participants provided several key challenges, including, but not limited to, amount of assessment, student attendance, access, washback, placement tests, time constraints, failure and suitability. Each theme and corresponding categories are analysed in greater detail in the following sections.

## **5.1 Teachers' Role(s)**

As illustrated in the above figure, the participants were asked about their role(s) in the assessment practices in the ELI. Their responses seemed to vary according to the type of assessment they were referring to; therefore, the data related to this theme were divided accordingly into two categories: (1) summative and (2) continuous assessment.

### **5.1.1 Potential Role in Summative Assessment**

Teachers were asked about their involvement in summative assessment and the interview data revealed that teachers were divided into different groups. One first group of teachers was involved in the actual test writing and test preparation. Another group, which counted a majority of teachers, only saw themselves as test

administrators and invigilators and did not believe to be involved at all in summative assessment. Others commented on their role in test marking and feedback. It is worth mentioning here that teachers do not choose to join the testing committee as this decision was left to the institution who usually takes the responsibility of assigning specific faculty members to each committee. I will explore the teachers' responses in further detail below.

#### **5.1.1.1 Role in Design**

Being a member of the testing committee was a privilege that not all the teachers enjoyed; however, according to the interview data, this meant having an active role in the summative assessment in the institution. Ali's response is a clear example of this view:

As a member of the testing committee in the past, I have been involved in many times in the writing and preparing tests and questions over the past years [...], but previously years ago I remember that teachers were more involved in this process than they are now. I don't know if teachers will eventually be excluded from taking part in the assessment. Is it going to continue the same way or not? Let me be optimistic and say maybe things are going to change in the future, but if I compare the case now with the case that we had four years ago, previously teachers were more involved in this process.

It is clear from the above quote that not all the teachers have a role when it comes to designing the summative assessments in the institution. More importantly, Ali indicated that the teachers' involvement in design has actually been declining over the years, notably over a period of four years only. However, it can be argued that this statement is relatively not convincing to quantify that decline because Ali did not mention by how much, or even how to measure that role. He did not clearly indicate the details of what he meant by role in design and if there could be other reasons that impacted that. This view has also been reported by Ahmed, as showed in the following quote:

I am currently working as one of the members of the testing unit and I also coordinate the unit. Well it means that I do have an active role when it comes to assessment and tests. This role includes creating test items, and proofreading other test items submitted by the teachers to the testing bank

Ahmed's clearly sees himself as having an active role in the assessment committee, including involvement in assessment and test design in addition to overall coordination and administration. His words somehow hint to the exclusivity of the duty to the testing unit committee members.

To support the above finding, the same view has been reported by Wadee, a teacher who is not on the testing committee, who stated clearly that in order for the teacher to have a role or a voice in any kind of summative assessment, he/she needs to be in the testing committee. However, Wadee was more vocal in declaring that most teachers almost have no role except in test delivery. He also added the following statement:

All the decisions about the tests, and decisions on which area you want to evaluate the students on, you only have that power if you are a member of the unit. The other teachers don't have anything; they just receive the test. In fact, nowadays it's computerised therefore they don't even receive anything. [...] So the teachers don't have a "say" only the testing unit will decide on the best choice of the items and everything.

The following statements from Suliman, who was the head of the testing committee in the past, confirmed the comprehensive role of committee members for the entire administration:

I used to be responsible for the management of the exams, preparation of the external exam. Yeah, I have done that, I mean, I have prepared the exam for [thousands of] students [...] Our duties included proofreading tests, we also do printing, packing, deciding on a plan for each test and trying to do the management for the exam organisation on everything.

Suliman was asked about the contribution and the role of the remaining teachers in terms of preparation for the summative assessment to which stated:

You see because it's specifically testing. You cannot include everyone in this process because there is a huge issue of security involved. Any access to the questions and tests should be limited to the testing committee who have been chosen carefully. The only general contribution I can remember was the testing bank.

The testing bank in the institution used to be a digital bank that all teachers are requested to submit questions and answers to it regularly. Teachers would submit

the questions and tests they think are suitable to be used in the summative assessments in the ELI. Essentially, Suliman highlights an important and valid concern about exam security. As unfortunately in the past, on rare occasions the ELI faced a number of problems with certain tests being leaked and exams breached. Suliman seemed to be confident with the idea of limiting the management and design of exams to a specific committee.

Nevertheless, in the past some teachers in the institution had a chance to contribute in the summative assessments and exams through the testing bank. However, it should be mentioned that this digital bank ceased to exist and was deemed no longer useful by the institution. The reasons for this have been explained by several teachers including Ahmed, Soad and Wadee. Wadee's interview statement is an example of this view:

They used to ask teachers to send tests from time to time to the testing bank. But to be honest we don't use them because you will spend time filtering them... Which takes much more time than actually writing a new test.

The above statement highlights yet another concern that pertains to exam bank exchanges with teachers and the amount of time and efforts needed to manage this process. Basically, this inefficiency of test bank management may have resulted in limiting exam design efforts to a certain committee. Additionally, and beside security and bank management efforts, Wadee also said that the material submitted to the testing bank were very poor in quality. He added that a lot of the work was copied from the Internet or from other textbooks. This bank was also criticised by another teacher, Eman, who stated that:

we were not given a lot of time for that [submitting questions to the testing bank]. I mean, we were just given two days to just sit and come up with a final exam to submit. That was a bit too quick for the teachers [...] I mean, you should give teachers some time to actually work on it and to make some good questions and which they believe students should be tested on.

A large number of teachers such as Wadee, Soad, and Ali indicated that teachers should have a voice and be involved in the design of summative assessment materials. Even with the above potential reasoning by testing unit committees, it

seems that teachers are generally disappointed and wish to have more roles. Iqbal interview statement below reflects this view clearly:

I believe that teachers should be involved... I mean how it possible is that teachers who teach in the classroom they do not have any say in the assessment! [...]. I think this is not appropriate, I believe that teachers who are involved in teaching they should be part of the assessment. At least they should have a say

It seems that at the level of designing and writing summative assessment exams only teachers on that committee have an active role. It is clear that teachers who are not members of the assessment committee cannot participate or contribute even if they wanted to. Wadee, Soad, and Ali all explained in their own words that they would want to have a say or a voice in the summative assessments that take place in the ELI. They argue that the voice of the classroom teacher is very important in the summative assessment tests because teachers who taught the material over the term know exactly which questions to include and what test materials to exclude from their exams.

Again, as mentioned above, one of the justifications in the data for this exclusion was that summative assessment should be limited to a small group for security reasons and also the administration of teachers that come from different backgrounds and may have different expectations. Wadee's statement in his interview is a clear indication of that:

I mean we have so many different teachers coming in and out. From so many different countries with so many different experiences. I think the management of anything whether it's assessment or testing or curriculum should be within one group of teachers. Because I used to work with other people on exams. And you would have different ideas about the same item okay. And you keep on arguing and arguing and arguing because everybody has different views on the designs of the tests or item included and excluded from the tests. With a large group you're not going to reach a solution... and this is normal. But if you want a quick fast solution with the results, you have to have a small group that decides everything.

Furthermore, in supporting the above assertions, a strong statement by Afnan, who in the past, used to be a member of the testing committees clearly supports limiting

the access to the summative assessment and tests as she clarified the need for test unification and quality control:

And if you want things to be unified [standard] they must be controlled. And if you want them to be controlled you need to exclude people as much as you can. [...] you just make it with a small group [of teachers] so you can control it

Another teacher, Soad, also said in her interview that limiting the people who have access to the tests in the institution is definitely in the benefit of the students by having a test that is fair to all students. That is to say, unification, fairness and security totally justified the need of limited access design process. She clarified that by stating:

you can't also give the teacher full access or full control for assessment because we have different teachers with different views. And you don't want to jeopardise the student's life based on the teacher's views without any criteria. Students will come to you and say why your exam is really different, why the other teacher is just giving marks to the students?

Jamal stated very strongly that there is a clear hierarchy of academic staff and that there is a need to limit test specifics to a certain committee:

I don't see why the remaining teachers in the institution need to be involved in every decision the testing committee has to take

The data also revealed that the issue of trusting teachers with summative assessment played an important role in excluding teachers from an active role in it. Iqbal argued that if the institution wants to involve teachers in assessment they can. However, one of the obstacles hindering this involvement is the issue of trust as he clearly stated in his interview:

In order for teachers to be involved in assessment and especially writing tests, I think there should be some trust building measures to create trust among the people of the administration and the teachers. This would absolutely help in getting teachers more involved with the assessment of the students.

To further support the above assertion, Saeed highlighted the trust issue area and its importance by stating that:

There is no bound of trust in teachers and in my opinion that is really important. You see when the teacher is left in the classroom without any real authority. I just believe that these rules that they put limit the teacher's creativity and makes him feel that he is maybe unqualified or something

In conclusion, the above statements generally highlight few reasons and justification, such as effort, administration, security and quality control, to limit access to certain testing development procedures. On the other hand, it demonstrated the surprised attitude of teachers regarding this exclusion.

#### **5.1.1.2 The Washback Effect (Teaching for the Test)**

The data showed that a number of teachers raised the issue of washback and how it impacts the classroom instruction and student learning. A number of teachers mentioned that their students' motivation and classroom teaching are affected by the students concentrating only on summative assessments.

Raj's interview statement is an example of this and labels this trend as a cultural phenomenon where students are only concerned with passing grades and not the actual learning process:

Another factor which is very important in the Saudi context: students are more interested in the grades than actual learning. Primarily it's a grade-driven culture, they are too much into getting good grades without learning the language skills. It's all about how to pass the test. ...to be frank one of the problems you see as soon as they know how little they are going to get for class participation in the classroom they are immediately uninterested.

This sort of behaviour was mentioned by a number of teachers. Eman, for example, stated that students are only worried about the final exam. The reason she highlighting this view is because it relates to the previous design issue, and the teacher's inability to correctly prepare the students for the exams as teachers are kept in the dark. She adds that:

They [students] start asking about the final exam and the mid module exam as they hold 60% of the mark. This in turn shifts the focus in the classroom to the midterm and final exam. And of course the regular question we always get near the end of the module: "Teacher is this going to be in the Final exam?"

A number of teachers declared that they could only get their students' attention by mentioning that what they are explaining might be in the test. This further iterates the issues of cultural orientation of students to only pay attention to grades.

Saeed's statement is a clear example:

when it comes to preparing the students for the tests, I do have a role and that's one of my main jobs as a teacher. I mean students are usually unmotivated in class, but the funny thing is as soon as you would say or mention the word "test" or "this might be in the test", you would magically get all of the students' undivided attention. They are really interested in grades... unfortunately, interested in grades more than learning

Soad also complains about not being involved or having a voice in the summative assessment practices. Teachers can be very frustrated when they are asked about specifics of the test and what is covered while they are not given any opportunity to participate in the test design process. I think this can lead to a huge problem with teacher job satisfaction and performance. Here, Soad clearly stated:

I am not involved in the curriculum. I am not involved in the assessment. I am not involved in the ELI. I am not involved, you know, as a teacher I am not involved in anything. I go to the class and teach and students ask questions about the tests that I don't have a clue about that. So I look ridiculous in my class. So I know I am not involved at all

Another teacher Rami indicated that not having access to any of the exams made him feel powerless. This was clear in his interview:

No we don't have any role when preparing the tests. Only the people and the testing committee have that kind of power. The problem is the students also know that 'you' as a teacher don't have that kind of power. In fact, I heard from other colleagues that students would hunt down the teachers in the testing committee and ask them all sort of questions about the test and how it's going to come. Why can't they ask their teachers? ...In my opinion, this really makes me feel powerless. This shouldn't happen in an institution like ours, teachers need a more active role in the tests and how they are prepared.

In sum, the above quotes highlight a huge issue, which is the lack of teacher's control over job satisfaction and their inability to contribute to testing. This



coincides with the cultural habit that students exhibit by being only concerned with final exams and nothing else in the course.

#### **5.1.1.3 Administration of the Test**

According to the data, currently, ELI teachers are only responsible of administering the midterm and final exam to the students in computer labs. Abdul clarified this limited role by stating:

You see nowadays our role is very limited when it comes to exams. We are only invigilators and the computer labs [are] where students take the midterm and final exams. We don't know how the questions are going to come or how many of them. We just walk into the room ask the students to sit in the allocated computers and make sure that they don't cheat from each other.

Jamal also limited the role of the teacher when it comes to summative assessment to an invigilator role. Again, this may add to teacher's dissatisfaction as Jamal compared himself to an "invigilator", which is a role taken usually by demonstrators and teaching assistants, in most countries, and those staff are far less trained than teachers. He basically felt a bit of down-grading of his role and academic duty. He elaborated on this issue by stating:

I conduct my own assessment in the classroom with my students. But when it comes to the mid-term or final exam I am only an observer. The tests are written by the testing committee, which of course only the teachers in the committee have access to them. ... In the past we used to administer the test, give the students the papers, collect them back after they finished then hand them in to the testing committee who corrects them electronically. Now everything is computerised... we don't need to do that anymore.

The above is a strong finding as teachers are indicating that their role is decreasing and they are getting less involved in administering summative assessment practices with the students, as mentioned by Farooq in his interview:

well to be Frank my role is very limited. All the tests are prepared by the committee. We just collect the exam papers from the testing committee on the day of the test. Allocate our students in their specific seats and then distribute the different exam versions to them. Then after they finish we collect the papers and return them back to the committee. Of course this has recently changed ... they have started conducting the midterm and final exam in

computer labs. What I have understood is that from next term there will be no more paper exams ... this means thanks to God less works for us

According to the above findings, it can be noted that the limited role of teachers affected different teachers differently. Some teachers felt frustrated and claimed that the lack of role affected their job and ability to lead the class room while others were pleased and relieved that this duty had been lifted off of their shoulders and handled by other teachers.

#### **5.1.1.4 Marking**

According to the data, teachers in ELI do not mark or give grades in summative assessment. This role is now done electronically and monitored by the assessment committee. Ali also supported this idea, however, he looked at it from a different perspective. He indicated in his interview that it is the students' rights to know how they did in an exam and what mistakes they made. Ali clearly indicated his dissatisfaction as in this statement:

Teachers and the testing unit, the curriculum unit are not giving this important part of the learning [assessment and feedback] the attention that [it] should be given. For example, students after each – I am talking here about the formal exams... After the mid-term exam and the final exam, are not allowed to check where they did right, where they did wrong. So, they are not giving their papers back. [The students] should be allowed to see their mistakes – what was wrong, what was right when they answered. This is a very important part in the teaching and learning process [...] and this has been the case even before they computerised the exam. This has been the case for years now.

This is a serious issue as Ali was almost hinting that he was powerless; not only he did not contribute to test design but also he was not able to interact with students and guide them through feedback and performance improvement hints because exams are now graded outside the control of the teacher. If students cannot figure out what mistakes they made in a mid-term, for instance, they would never be able to learn from those mistakes and improve for future exams.

On the other hand, and in a contrasting opinion, Farooq and Suliman mentioned in the interviews that they were happy and satisfied that the assessment had been

dedicated to a special team. Farooq clarified the reasons behind this by stating in his interview that:

You see in the past I remember that teachers had the opportunity to write tests and mark them for their own students. The problem is that honestly you would find teachers giving all students between 90 and 80 and even 100 while another teacher you would find half of the class failing and the other half between 50 and 60 or something. This drove the administration crazy

Basically, the above statement justified exam design and marking process to a few, but at the same time highlights the existence of a far more serious issue with academic and curricular administration. Basically, they were hinting that teachers were not able to adjust grades and test levels adequately, and that may mean that teachers were not trained well anymore to design and mark their students.

To support the above finding, Raj also commented on how the students are being marked in the ELI. He complained that the institution was generally encouraging teachers to give students good marks. He also continued stating:

I said at least we have to develop their skills as well. That is our responsibility as teachers. I believe that we are too generous with grades. I am personally a generous person. However, when I'm generous I have to be just as well... to be just and generous in my assessment grading and marking.

In essence, Raj was saying that he was not able to be neutral and objective when it comes to academic performance assessment and quality control and that is dangerous. He questioned whether it was fair for a teacher to be generous to everyone without realising that giving easy grades to everyone would undermine the learning process and discourage students from studying. This could highlight a problem in teacher training and skill development.

#### **5.1.1.5 Teachers are Unable to Provide Feedback**

One of the major issues that appeared from the data was the fact that teachers cannot give students feedback on the summative assessment. Afnan stated that when she started working in the institution, she could discuss students' mistakes with them after the mid-term. She clarified that this was not possible anymore

because exams are now computerised and students do not have access to the answers, as she also stated:

Well, to be honest, it made me feel powerless... I mean I need to know my students' mistakes in order to work with them and not have them repeat those mistakes... You see I remember when I was a student that I could discuss with my teachers my mistakes. For example, why have I did 'this' wrong or why 'this' answer is better than 'that' other answer. This sort of opportunity is not available for the ELI teacher, unfortunately.

She also clarified that this affected her image in front of her students:

Their [the teachers] main frustration was that they can't answer their questions of their students. Because you know if the students have any problem with the tests... Then the student won't go to the test unit... She immediately will go to her first... You know... Her first target is the teacher. And the teacher cannot give them any kind of feedback as the teacher does not know anything about the test. This will also affect her image in front of the students

Not providing feedback can be very problematic to student learning and academic performance. If teachers cannot tell their students how they did in the exam, how could students learn from mistakes? Trial and error is a very important approach to learning; students are expected to make mistakes as part of the learning process, however if they are denied the opportunity to know their mistakes and learn from them, then language learning is very likely to be hindered.

Haroon was also complaining about not having a chance to provide his students with proper feedback on the exams he stated that:

Now this computer-based exam actually deprived us from the following up or checking or revising with my students for the exam because you don't have the hard copy to work with the students in the class to revise [...] So if students asks a questions 'I did that in the exam, what do you think?' I say, 'I don't know'. I haven't seen, I don't have papers, I don't mark. [The new system] has disadvantages more than advantages. [...] because I can't give students hints. I can't revise with the students after the exam and especially there are so many versions of the same exam so it's not feasible

### **5.1.2 Continuous Assessment**

Unlike with the summative assessment, the majority of the teachers feel that they are involved and have a role in the students' continuous assessment practices in the classroom. It is worth mentioning here that the continuous assessment discussed with the teachers is also marked and represents 20% of the overall students' grade. (I am not referring here to the ungraded normal everyday continuous assessment that teachers conduct in the classroom with their students). Teachers saw that having the opportunity to produce and to give students feedback was seen as a major indication of their role and involvement. Nevertheless, some teachers felt that they were excluded when it comes to continuous assessment in the classroom.

#### **5.1.2.1 Potential Role in Design**

The data revealed that teachers implement continuous assessment practices dictated to them by the administration. A number of teachers believed that they do not have an active role in designing those assessment practices in the classroom.

For instance, Ali mentioned the issue of preparing the students on one topic and then assessing them in the same one. He also complained from having everything even the continuous assessment materials, questions and topics decided by the administration. In his interview, he was asked if he had freedom of choice when it comes to the materials he used in continuous assessment and he replied:

Of course not, everything is decided for us. We get all the materials or the questions and even the sheets that the students answer are from the administration [...] the teacher has nothing to say in this matter, we just follow the rules

Raj and Iqbal both believed that teachers need to be more involved in their students' continuous assessment. They advocated that one of the responsibilities of the teacher is to find a way to help their students during their continuous assessment, clearly stated by Raj:

I feel that my students have very little practice before they give their final assessed presentations. [...] Few teachers here make personal efforts to develop the students' skills this is quite

unfortunate ... it's better that students don't just memorise their presentations

Three of the teachers (namely, Jamal, Iqbal and Afnan) indicated that they were not happy about the role in continuous assessment when it comes to reading. They were not satisfied that all the materials were pre-selected by the administration. They indicated that the teacher would definitely have a better understanding of his/her students reading abilities and needs. The interview statement of Jamal is a clear indication of that:

Yeah. I have almost no control over some of the grades of the continuous assessment [...] when assessing reading in the classroom I don't really feel I can do much students are always disengaged and uninterested. [...] Actually, the reading materials are already chosen for us [the teachers] by the administration. You see sometimes they are not suitable for my students... Not all classes are the same I mean their levels vary a lot... That's why I believe that teachers should be the one choosing the materials according to his students

#### **5.1.2.2 Administration of the Test**

According to the data, teachers in the ELI are the ones conducting the continuous assessment with the students. Iqbal, for example, stated that when it comes to continuous assessment in the classroom, he is the one taking charge of this and deciding how and when to execute his assessment. Yet, when it comes to summative assessment, his role was still limited. He concluded by stating that: "but in the mid module or final exam I am not involved". Raj also indicated that teachers have an active role in continuous assessment; however, this role was limited as he stated:

I mean they are given some flexibility, but is still very tightly controlled. In addition to that, we have a pacing guide. Therefore, the assessment dates are already decided and fixed by the administration and the teacher has to follow them.

On the other hand, teachers also stated that when they are assessing the students in the classroom, they do enjoy a level of independence and freedom. The following statement by Medhat is a valid example:

So, in the pacing guide provided by curriculum unit, it shows on which week to do the continuous assessment, but not what day, so the teacher has some sort of control on how and when to conduct the writing, speaking, and listening assessments with his own students.

The above indicates a larger role for teachers in continuous assessment than summative assessment as they often have control over certain things but not the ultimate details.

According to the data, a number of teachers such as Medhat, Raj, and Afnan, believed that each teacher in the ELI should be capable of conducting his/her continuous assessment whether or not it is mentioned in the teachers' pacing guide. Medhat stated that "a teacher who has got enough experience should have more freedom in adjusting instructions in the pacing guide" in order to continuously assess his students. The above basically says that teachers are so frustrated with their limited role that they needed to go around the guidelines and improvise to realise their role.

#### **5.1.2.3 *Unbalanced Marking***

The data revealed that the majority of the participants were not happy with the mark distribution. According to the rubrics of the ELI, the marks are distributed as follows:

**Table 4: ELI Assessment Overview**

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Type of Assessment</b>	<b>Component Percent of Grade</b>	<b>Total Grade</b>
Computer-Based Mid-Module Examination	Summative	20%	80%
Computer-Based Final Examination	Summative	40%	
One Speaking Examination	Summative	10%	
One Writing Examination	Summative	10%	
Supplementary Reading Programme	Continuous	5%	20%
Supplementary Writing Programme	Continuous	5%	
Supplementary Speaking Programme	Continuous	5%	
Independent practice	Continuous	5%	

Wadee reflected on the issue of mark distribution and indicated that continuous assessment is only given 20% of the whole mark. This is the first statement that clearly quantified the level of control of the teacher over assessment and it is very limited, as he indicated in his interview:

However, the teacher only controls 20% of the mark. Five marks in the reading and five marks in the writing there is also five marks for speaking and five marks for LMS. Can you imagine having only five marks under your control during the whole module? It is very difficult to motivate students with this kind of marks distribution... Of course, the students are not going to be interested. It's only five marks!



To support this assertion further, Raj's quote is a good example of how teachers were unhappy with the low percentage allocated to continuous assessment and stated that:

In fact, we are supposed to share and we are asked to share the rubrics with the students and we explain to the students how we are going to mark their essays in all different language skills we assess them in. To be frank that is one of the problems you see as soon as they know how little they are going to get for class participation and continuous assessment in the classroom, they are immediately uninterested. They start asking about the final exam and the mid module exam as they hold 60% of the Mark

This unbalanced mark distribution can lead to further problems as Haroon highlighted the issue of everyone in the classroom getting the full mark, and how little allocation to important aspects of assessment can lead to a skewed academic performance and skill development:

Yes, students need to write their answers in the reading booklet, I mean, when we finish then I calculate the marks. Most of them get the full Mark. Keep in mind that it's only five marks and we answer together in the classroom. Therefore, everybody is going to get the correct answers. You see they have the questions at home and they just need to answer the questions in the classroom

Wadee also saw himself as a 'facilitator' in the reading component of continuous assessment. He explained that he can put his students in groups to work on a reading passage while he supervises the students as they look up words in dictionaries and discuss difficult words among themselves and with the teacher. Saeed and Haroon both indicated that when it comes to continuous assessment of reading, the students are not really involved due to two reasons. The first reason was reading was only allocated 5% of the whole mark so students did not give it much attention. The second reason was that if the students attend the reading classes, they basically get the full mark.

Saeed raised the issue of only having 5% of the students' grade –five marks– allocated to the continuous assessment of reading played an important role in students losing interest in the reading practices in the classroom, as he clarified in his interview:

in my case students need to read something at home and then come present and answer some questions in class, however, you need to keep one thing in mind that anything without marks or any immediate kind of, you know, compensation will not help students to participate or learn anything

Ali continued and mentioned some limitations of his role as a teacher in the reading assessment practices. He complained that simply attending the reading assessment sessions does not qualify students to get marks, as he clarified in his interview:

I feel that it's new way of assessment where students are assessed based on attendance and completion of the task given. Of course all of them, all those who attended and sometimes who didn't attend would come at the end giving you the exercise and the tasks related to or relevant to the story with all the questions answered, you know, the copy and paste culture not only here in I would say all the Arab world, students think that when they copy and at the end they come they are somehow entitled to get the marks. But really giving them marks just for attending I don't think that is assessing... I really don't think it is teaching also

#### **5.1.2.4 Feedback**

When it comes to feedback on continuous assessment, the following statements present a more satisfactory outcome. Raj also expressed that he could see his role and duties very clearly when it comes to assessing his students writing. He clarified in his interview:

I believe that the ELI have developed a very good system with regards to feedback. We have to give them [the students] feedback in writing now. And orally as well. We follow IELTS rubrics or IELTS codes for highlighting students' mistakes. Like if there is a structural error we write SS. Or spelling we write SP. If there is a word that is redundant we write NN. We point out these things on the first draft that the students write. And then students write the second draft. We also give subjective feedback like: "you should work in these areas for example your structure, your grammar, your spelling is poor". Sometimes, we tell them you need to improve your vocabulary. Also on paragraphing and other stylistic features. And then the students write the second draft. And there is usually quite a good improvement because they write it again and fix the mistakes that have been pointed out to them [...] This is how we give them feedback

Iqbal also stated in his interview that he did the feedback work on the students' first two writing drafts like Raj indicated in his interview. But he continued stating that after the second draft he took the third draft with him home to assess and grade and clearly distinguished between his involvement here and his exclusion from any kind of involvement in summative assessment. In his interview he clarified his point:

Now, they have given me the final draft, I am going to check over the weekend for them. That's the only involvement I have in the assessment of my students writing. But in the mid module or final exam I am not involved. So with regard to freedom and participation I feel that it is less than the previous times.

Soad raised a different issue, which is not having the proper opportunity to give feedback in the continuous speaking assessment, as she indicated in her interview:

I know exactly what are their [the students] strengths and weaknesses in the writing. So I give them very good feedback in writing, but I don't have the chance to give a feedback on speaking because in the classroom I don't have the time to practice speaking. This is like a major issue to me because I don't have that time to give – to practice speaking and so I don't give feedback on speaking.

Eman also agreed with Soad with regards not having the opportunity to give proper feedback on her students speaking skills on the continuous speaking assessment day. She was advocating that the teacher has the power and knowledge to assess her students during the whole module not just on the day of the assessment, as in the following statement:

Sometimes, I feel very limited because everything is given to you like I would – in speaking for example, I would like to assess my girls on the basis of their overall participation and their overall efforts, not just on the examination day

Wadee was one of the teachers who felt that when it comes to continuous assessment in writing, he had an active role, as he clarified in his interview statement:

Well with the writing there is a chance for feedback because the students' answers and writes an essay then it's given to the teacher who writes feedback on the student's paper and then gives back to the students. This feedback going back and forth enables the students to rewrite it again and again.

## 5.2 Teachers' Belief(s)

Having addressed teacher's roles, I now move to the second theme regarding teachers' belief(s) which has different aspects as demonstrated below:

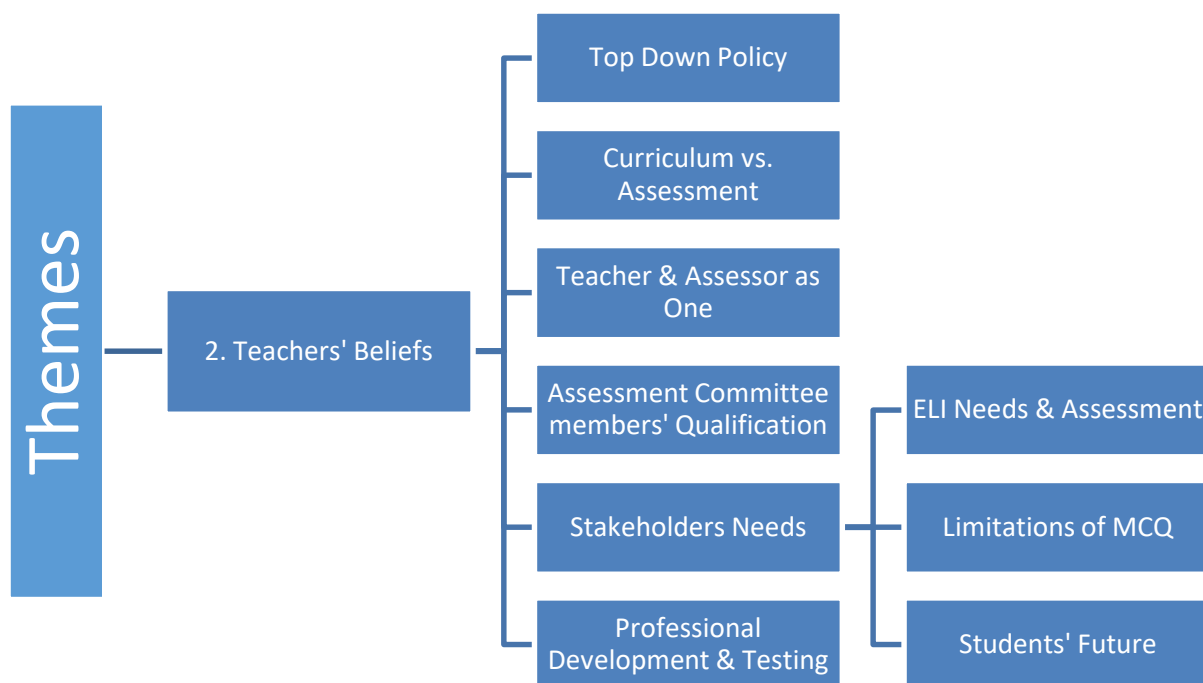


Figure 5: Teachers' beliefs themes & categories derived from the data analysis

The second research question revolves around the belief(s) of the ELI teachers regarding the language assessment practices in the ELI. This research question

looks into exploring the different views and beliefs that the teachers hold in regards to language assessment practices at university level. The participants were asked what they thought about language assessment in the institution. The reported responses by the participants were classified, for data analysis purposes, into six main categories: ELI policy, curriculum vs. assessment, teacher & assessor as one, Assessment Committee members' qualification, stakeholders' needs, and Professional Development & testing. The data driven from the category (stakeholders needs) was vast; therefore, it was divided and organised into three subthemes. The first subtheme discussed both the needs of the ELI and the needs of the remaining university faculties, while the second sub-theme section discussed the limitations of multiple choice questions (MCQs) and finally, the third sub-theme revolved around teachers' Professional Development needs in ELI.

### **5.2.1 Top-down Policy**

Teachers were asked what they think of the current assessment procedures in the ELI. The majority of teachers touched on the issue of the ELI policy, where data revealed that teachers raised the issue of higher administration interfering in their work. For example, Wadee stated that in the past, when he was working within the assessment committee, the administration interfered and caused a lot of disruption to the assessment and testing process, as he stated:

So, the Dean interfered and sent us five [...] qualified teachers and told them to go and help us in the committee... Okay, help with designing questions... But the problem was we ended up spending more time and effort understanding what they wanted to do and say and understanding their views. This interference by the administration resulted in a huge waste of time and effort instead of actually finishing the test and doing the work

It could be argued that, this interference from the higher administration originally took place in order to take some workload off the current people on the assessment committee and to help with the quality of the tests provided. However, according to the teachers this backfired as it took more time and effort to reach to an agreement on assessment questions and procedure with the new assigned teachers to the committee. According to the data from the interviews, the policy system in the ELI runs in one direction while the voices of teachers, especially

when it comes to assessment are often not heard. Raj clearly stated that “everything is centrally controlled... The ELI has a highly regimented system”. Having this type of system really limits the opportunity to have teachers’ voices heard. This is supported by most of the teachers who were interviewed. For example, Saeed mentions in his interview that:

Basically policies are made upstairs and then they are passed to the people downstairs and we have to apply them... I feel that the teacher has no voice in assessment, not at all ... you see they do ask for teachers’ feedback in curriculum and other issues but not in assessment

It should be noted that the lack of teachers’ voice in assessment is not completely due to the fact that the teachers do not want to get involved. The data revealed that teachers did in fact want to get themselves heard and they did have some concerns; however, they preferred to avoid getting involved. Raj touched on the reasons behind this limited involvement and mentioned in his interview that teachers did not want to be known as troublemakers; therefore, they simply avoid sharing their opinions, as he clearly stated:

Teachers coming from Asia, they come here for a long stay five years, ten years, sometimes even 20 years. So then they don’t want to make waves. In order to ensure that their stay will not be interrupted. That’s the attitude here. Most of the people [teachers] here have a kind of laid-back attitude. They say “okay let the system go wherever it goes, we will just go with the flow; we will not be the people making trouble”

To illustrate this point further, another teacher, Abdul, explained how he tried to be involved and illustrated that giving your honest opinion can sometimes cause problems for the teacher:

We tried saying something regarding this issue. I remember that I used to talk and talk with my colleagues and complain about mistakes and issues in the tests. I clearly remember that my coordinator came and talked to me -one on one- telling me things like: “what are you doing? You shouldn’t complain a lot! It is not in your best interest!” .... You see getting comments like these makes you realise that the administration and the people up there are not interested in our opinion

Iqbal reinforces this belief and states that teachers are forced to follow the policy imposed on them by the administration clarifying that this sometimes causes some difficulties and some restrictions on the teacher:

Nowadays in the institution we have more restrictions we have to follow a strict pattern and if we go beyond that, I think our students are going to be penalised for that

Khan also complained that the ELI policy with regards to writing is insufficient. Writing is not getting the attention it deserves. In his interview he stated:

To tell you the truth I don't really agree with the system. I think that we need to do more writing, we need to give them more writing practice at home, and as far as I'm concerned, for my students I give them additional homework... I really give them a lot to do at home you see I don't follow the rubrics strictly. The rubrics want me to ask my students to write three drafts well I write with them about 10 to 12 different drafts and I find that this really works, they improve, they learn, they develop, and they are curious to learn more and to do more

The above quotes all show that teachers are unsatisfied with the way the policy and assessment is taking place. They argue for an active role in testing and in policy-making. Although their interviews focused on assessment, teachers also touched on the curriculum and how there is a mismatch between it and assessment. This will be discussed in the following section.

### **5.2.2 Curriculum vs. Assessment**

One of the current challenges for the teachers was the mismatch between the ELI curriculum and how the students were evaluated in the midterm and final exams. In the literature, curriculum is considered as the top envelop for learning and assessment is usually under or part of it as a final stage. Nation and Macalister (2010) argue that any assessment design should take into account the environment of where the learning is taking place, the learners' needs and the principles of teaching and learning. All previous aspects are usually covered and dealt with in the curriculum unit. However, in the ELI this used to be the case and the assessment unit was part of the curriculum unit. The policy changed a few years ago and now the assessment unit is completely separate from the curriculum

unit and both report back to the higher administration immediately. According to the gathered data, this created a gap of communication between the curriculum committee and the assessment committee. This gap was noted by the teachers and discussed in their interviews. The following quotes are examples of some of the teachers' concerns:

Raj for example touched on the issue of his inability to deliver the requirements of the curriculum to the students:

Currently, assessment is just aimed at students' achievement ... have they learnt something or not. And there are flaws there a lot. It's really difficult to focus on the curriculum. The fact remains that when I try to teach my students, I usually end up focusing on familiarising students with previous tests rather than teaching them a language skill they will need to use to continue their studies

Iqbal also shared the beliefs of Raj and argued that the tests were affecting the curriculum in a negative way:

It seems that we were just preparing our students for the test all the time. I mean you can say that these tests, unfortunately, killed the goal of education as a whole. Many issues in the curriculum cannot be covered due to the fact that we need to prepare our students for the mid-term and final exams [...] The problem is the curriculum, and the pacing guide does not help you with that ... there is no place for providing students with the knowledge and skills required to pass the final test

Smith, who is a teacher and part of the curriculum unit, also mentioned the mismatch between assessment and curriculum directly:

There is a mismatch between [...] between curriculum and assessment, between our student learning outcomes and the assessment tools used to measure them

Smith continued to highlight the importance of working together with the Curriculum Unit:

I don't see the exam questions and I am part of the Curriculum Unit and I don't know anything about the exam! [...] All I know is that we really ought to try to meet more regularly... the Testing Unit and the Curriculum Unit



Other participants in the study shared similar feelings and concerns. The fact remains that in the institution the tools used for the summative assessment and represented in the mid-module and the final exams need to match the students learning objectives. For example, one of the main Students' Learning Objectives (SLOs) is to produce students who can communicate in English i.e. produce language. However, according to Smith, the exams in the ELI mainly focus on receptive skills, as he explained in his interview:

our assessment tools do not reflect that because 60% of the grade is based on a summative exam, mid-module, end of module test which focuses on reading, listening, reading comprehension and use of English, so lexical grammar, and that is multiple choice. So the learners are not actually required to produce any language. They are only required to recognise and discriminate between different forms.

As Smith mentioned above, the majority of interviewed teachers indicated that the institute needs to concentrate more on students learning productive skills rather than receptive ones by arguing that productive skills, like writing and speaking, are highly required in their future academic life. Saeed's statement is a good example for this stand: "you see less time is given to writing in the class too. More, I mean, the book itself, the syllabus itself that is more focused on the receptive skills, the productive skills are given less time and probably that needs to be researched as well".

### **5.2.3 Teacher and Assessor as One**

Teachers in this study were asked whether they thought assessment should be left entirely to the assessment unit or whether teachers should be involved in the design and preparation of assessment practices in the institution. The data revealed that teachers had two different stances regarding these issues. One group were happy that this burden was dealt with, i.e. they believe that that assessment should be left to the assessment unit. For example, Jamal believed that teachers already had a lot on their hands:

You see the teachers have already a very big load of working hours and responsibilities. As long as the Testing Unit is addressing all of the students' needs, I don't see why the

remaining teachers in the institution need to be involved in every decision the Testing Committee has to take. So yes I would agree with this if they are going to assess the needs of my students

So Jamal thought that as long as the assessment unit was addressing his students' needs, he did not need to be involved in assessment. This stand is important as it clearly reveals that a number of teachers are happy with the current situation. Those teachers believed that they already had a lot on their hands, therefore separating the role of assessor from the role of the teacher is what they advocated.

Another teacher, Wadee, also agreed with this separation and advocated that having one group working on a sensitive issue like assessment is beneficial. This issue was also mentioned in the previous policy section where the data revealed that having a lot of teachers involved in assessment can sometimes be a waste of time:

I think the management of anything whether it's assessment or testing or curriculum should be within one group of teachers. Because I used to work with other people on exams. And you would have different ideas about the same item okay. And you keep on arguing and arguing and arguing because everybody has different views and you're not going to reach a solution.

Other teachers, such as Saeed, also believed that it is unrealistic for all teachers to get involved in assessment. He simply mentioned in his interview that "not all teachers should be involved, well it's not possible for 300 teachers to participate in preparing tests". The majority of the teachers indicated that in a huge institution like the ELI it is not possible for teachers to assess their students individually. A large number of them were advocating that assessment should be unified for all students in the institution due to the fact that the ELI exams are considered very high-stake exams for the students. This is due to the fact that according to the students' marks they will be allocated to their different faculties. Ali, for example, emphasised this point by stating:

The problem here in the Foundation Year Programme is that things should be unified. Remember we are dealing with thousands of students and every mark counts [...] that mark might enrol them in the engineering faculty and if they get one more for

example, 95 instead of 94, they might qualify to be enrolled in the faculty of medicine

Although the above quotes supporting the idea of allocating the responsibility of test design and assessment preparation to a specific team of teachers in the institution, the data also showed that there is a small group of teachers who believe that assessment is best left to each classroom teacher individually. Haroon, for instance, explains that the teacher is the best one to know the level of his/her students as not every classroom is the same:

Yeah, I should be in-charge of this section [assessment] right from the beginning to the end [...] now [the teacher] is the one who is in the classroom for three hours a day -at least- with the students, he knows the students better. [...] after two or three weeks, most of the teachers know their students and they are able to assess them according to their level and needs

Moussa also shared this opinion as he mentioned in his interview that not all classes have the same level; therefore, the teacher is the best person to adjust his/her assessment practices accordingly. He said: "I think that the teacher himself has to design his own tests according to the level of the students".

The data also showed that there is a group of teachers who prefer to hold a middle stance, i.e. teachers should have a role in the assessment practices at the same time there should be a unit or committee responsible for designing tests and assessments in the institution. Teachers like Ahmed, Khan, Wadee and Raj indicated very clearly that their opinion counts and matters. They also emphasised that their contribution is important. Khan's statement is an example of this:

I think it's a good idea to have an assessment unit, but I think this assessment unit also should be open to changes like they should bring in new people all the time and they should welcome ideas from the teachers. [...] Teachers must be asked from time to time for the feedback for their opinions, what they feel about, what they didn't want.

According to the above quotes, teachers in the institution fall into one of three categories: the first group is happy with limited involvement in assessment by saying that teachers already have a lot on their hands and they do not need any more responsibilities; the second group has strong beliefs that each teacher should

be able to assess his/ her students individually since the teacher is the one who is knowledgeable about the needs and level of his/ her class, and the last group is satisfied that there is a testing unit handling the design and production of tests, but at the same time believes that the teachers' voice should be heard and recognised within those assessment practices. The data also showed that teachers were concerned about the qualifications of the people involved in assessment this will be addressed in the next section.

#### **5.2.4 Assessment Committee Members' Qualification**

The data also revealed that a large number of teachers such as Moussa, Ali and Suliman were not happy with how the people in the testing committee are selected. They argued that there are no criteria or level of qualification required for such a position in the institution. These claims can clearly be seen in Raj's interview statement:

We had people in the Assessment Unit who had Masters in English Literature, people with Masters in Education only. Some with BA's in Mathematics. Some with CELTA, some with BA in Computer Science even or TESOL certificates. That is another problem that teachers are not properly qualified to deal with assessment

This was also supported by Wadee who claimed that assessment was being handed over sometimes to unqualified teachers in the institution. Iqbal also argued that people with the knowledge and qualifications in testing and assessment were not given an opportunity to participate, as he clearly stated in his interview:

People who are qualified in the relevant field, they are sideliners. And those who are not qualified are in charge of testing [...] I mean these bosses, especially those who are taking the key decisions, those people should be qualified in that relevant area. [...] in the ELI we have lots of professionals available here. But all the professionals are not given the chance to participate. Because as I mentioned, trust is an issue and people [teachers] are really trying hard to prove that they are trustworthy. [He says in a sad tone]

Other teachers like Afnan and Saeed, believed that the ELI institution was dealing with teachers as professionals. Saeed also highlighted this issue and its importance by stating:

There is no bond of trust in teachers and in my opinion that is really important. You see when the teacher is left in the classroom without any real authority. I just believe that these rules that they put limit the teacher's creativity and makes him feel that he is maybe unprofessional or something

Farooq added that the institution is capable of dealing with such issues by training teachers to deal with assessment effectively, as he mentioned in his interview:

Yeah, so we paid the price especially that [...] a lot of instructors are not well trained in assessment, okay. For example, if I did my Master's in English Literature that doesn't qualify me to be an English language assessor... The ELI should train me, or other teachers, to address this issue properly

Saeed explained in his interview that, on many occasions during his work within the ELI, they found several mistakes in the summative assessment examinations. He emphasised the point that administrators who are making the decisions for assessment in the institution should be qualified to do so. He added that they need to also be involved in the classroom and in teaching:

they are not prepared by qualified people who have expertise in assessment and that is another problem [...] the teachers – they need to be involved in the process. [...], those who sit upstairs and they make the policies, they haven't taught for the last 4-5 years so they know nothing about the classroom dynamics. Therefore, those who are involved in assessment, they need to be involved in teaching too. So they should know the classroom realities.

From the previous data and quotes, it seems that the ELI administration does not have a proper system for allocating and qualifying teachers in their specific positions. If the administration chooses to allocate any teacher to the assessment committee or remove any teacher from the committee, it can do so without giving any justification or consideration to the teachers' expertise and qualifications. It could be argued that the institution is more interested in maintaining the security and integrity of the tests thereby selecting committee members and teachers who they trust rather than who are qualified to be in such a position. This argument is

supported by previous quotes in the data about the importance of security issues when it comes to summative assessment.

## **5.2.5 Stakeholders Needs**

### **5.2.5.1 ELI & Needs Assessment**

The data showed that teachers are really concerned about how the curriculum and syllabus address the students' needs. In my study, there are three main stakeholders: the 'ELI', the 'teachers' and the 'students'. The majority of the teachers believe that the syllabus focuses on receptive skills rather than productive skills as discussed before. Having productive skills -as mentioned in the Faculty Handbook (Kinsara, 2011)- is one of the main goals of the institution i.e. administration of the ELI. Teachers also believe that having productive skills is very important. However, the data and the following quotes indicate that teachers believe that such skills are not addressed in the curriculum and therefore, not being addressed in the way students are examined and assessed. Soad and Haroon argued that there was a significant concentration on receptive skills as it can be seen from Haroon's interview statement:

The syllabus itself is more focused on the receptive skills, therefore when it comes to assessment naturally the productive skills are given less time and attention. I really think that this needs to be addressed in the ELI as I believe that our students need both skills equally

Smith, who works in the curriculum unit, agreed with this and argued that a comprehensive needs analysis must be conducted with the stakeholders to address our students' needs accurately; he stated:

The other thing that we would need [...] is to sit down with the key stakeholders in these different faculties [which students will join in the future] and talk about this is what they want, this is what we have done so far, this is what we can do, and meet somewhere in the middle

Rami, indicated that there is a need analysis procedure conducted in the institution, but he was under the belief that the students' needs were not assessed correctly. This, in his opinion, made the institution change its assessment practices too

frequently, which causes confusion to the teachers and the students as well. He further elaborated this point in his interview:

the needs analysis that is currently conducted is not enough. I mean I am an experienced teacher and the institution keeps changing assessment procedures and exams frequently. This makes us really confused. You see when a proper needs analysis is conducted you wouldn't need to change your procedures every now and then. You would know where you want your students to be exactly thereby assessing them accordingly

Because the ELI is preparing students to join their chosen faculties in the university, it could be argued that a regular and continuously updated needs analysis procedure should be conducted in which representatives from the ELI visit all of the faculties in the university and listen to their expectations and requirements of the students after they finish the Foundation Year Programme. Such a procedure will help bridge the gap between the curriculum in the ELI and the students' needs in the future in their allocated faculties.

#### **5.2.5.2 Limitations of MCQs**

The data revealed that using multiple choice questions in the midterm and final exam is not addressing the students' needs. Teachers argued that the ELI needs to assess the students' productive skills and this is not usually addressed by multiple choice questions. For example, Wadee argued that although he thought that in a huge institution like the ELI he could understand why Multiple Choice Questions were used, he stated that it was not enough and assessment procedures should measure student's productive skills like writing, as he clarified in his interview: "however, when you have to write the whole sentence it's going to be more accurate and challenging for the students and they will benefit more". Iqbal also supported this and compared it to the IELTS exam stating that:

These type of questions [MCQs] don't help the students improve their writing [...] I mean if you want them to really write you can't just ask students to pick and choose answers. That is not writing. If you considered the IELTS exam or TOEFL where you need to write extensively as students write 250 words about a topic [...] I think it's the time to allow our students to actually write and not just use MCQs to assess their ability in writing

The majority of teachers indicated that the students would undoubtedly have to write productively in their future faculties and highlighted the issue that students were going to write essays and reports in English and they were not just going to pick the correct answer from a list. They stressed that the continuous assessment currently available for writing, which weighs only 10% of their final mark, was not sufficient to address the students' needs in the future.

Saeed mentioned in his interview that students in fact get good marks because multiple choice questions are used in the mid-module tests and final tests. He said that although "students might be pleased with that but when they go to the professional colleges, people start to complain". Ali also mentioned that unfortunately students' skills are being affected by only using MCQs. He noted that the writing skills specially were not assessed accurately because of MCQs, he further clarified:

You see when students fill in the gaps or put the words in the correct order. It's not real writing; students who finished the foundation year should be able to write a whole paragraph, for example, if not even more

Farooq also agreed with Ali and said that when students join their specific faculties after the foundation year, they are "*asked to produce reports and essays in English*". He mentioned that this is addressed in the curriculum and textbooks used in the ELI. However, he highlighted the issue that when students are assessed in their mid-module and final exam, unfortunately, they are not required to produce any actual writing.

#### **5.2.5.3 Students' Future**

The data revealed that teachers believe that the four English language modules that every student has to take in order to pass the foundation year are not really sufficient for their needs in the future. Therefore, the ELI at the end of each module is assessing the capabilities for producing General English, while what the students actually need is Academic English. For example, Ali said that he is aware that they are teaching students General English and he mentioned to his superiors many times that students:



Should be supplemented with another book or component that should be related to their future studies. [...] I think that especially students of scientific colleges, students of Medicine, or students of Engineering should have some special material helping them cope in their future faculties

Another teacher, Medhat, agreed with Ali and explained that if they teach and assess their students for General English only, it will not benefit them in their future studies. He gave an example by saying:

I know several students who passed the Foundation Year and joined their colleges: College of Medicine and Engineering, and they told me specifically that the English they need to survive in their specific colleges was not provided for them by the Foundation Year Programme. Some of them told me they went abroad for English courses, while others joined private institutions in order to cope with the specific English requirements they need in their allocated faculties”

Jamal discussed the same issue in his interview, but from a different perspective where he stated that:

I think there isn't a connection between us and those colleges, there isn't actually. I think the only connection we have is between us and the higher administration in the university, but does the higher administration know about the needs of those colleges? I don't really think so

Soad, from the women section, indicated that it is not about how they assess the students, but rather the content of the course. She argued that it needs to be concentrating on their academic needs in the future:

if I am teaching general English language course and then I assess my students based on their future majors, we will end up with a real gap between the content and the assessment. [...] I don't like the content of the ELI because it is not directed for the students' future. It is not related to the students' majors; it's only General English

From the data, it is apparent that teachers need proper training in assessment. Not all the teachers have the skills or qualifications to assess their students accurately whether in continuous assessment or in summative assessment. This issue will be addressed in the next section.

### **5.2.6 Professional Development and Testing**

Training teachers to judge students' performance in summative and continuous assessments is quite an important issue in any language institution. According to Alderson, Clapham and Wall (1995) training teachers is an important component of any language testing programme. They highlighted the issue that if, for example, a test is not prepared correctly by teachers unqualified in assessment, there is a huge risk on the validity and reliability of this test. This could mean that if an institution does not prepare and train their examiners correctly, all the work done is considered inefficient because the students are not going to be assessed properly. In this section, teachers were asked to share their beliefs about assessment-related Professional Development courses and opportunities available in the ELI.

The data clearly showed that the majority of teachers indicated that they need to be trained in assessment. Medhat said that not all teachers have the skills to deal with assessment properly. He clarified in his interview that "some of our teachers here have only school teaching background. So they don't know anything about academic assessment in a huge institution like the ELI." He continued to argue that the institution needed to prepare and train teachers in assessment and possibly offer them crash courses or Professional Development seminars in assessment and testing. He argued that this would give teachers who are interested or who have a background about testing an opportunity to be up-to-date with all assessment related issues thereby helping the institution in the assessment area. It would also give teachers with no experience in assessment a chance to develop themselves in this area.

The participants were asked if they have a chance to participate in any Professional Development courses in the ELI. The majority of the participants mentioned that "yes" they do get involved and that many of the courses and workshops run throughout the year. However, when the participants were asked about assessment focused PD programmes offered by the ELI, only a limited number of teachers in this study (two) indicated that they got involved in a specific Assessment Professional Development training workshop offered by Lancaster University, UK.

However, interestingly the data revealed that the majority of the teachers heard about this workshop on assessment, which took place in the British Council in Jeddah late 2013. However, they clarified that that workshop was by invitation only and was not announced to everyone. Teachers knew through their colleagues about this exclusive assessment workshop and that it was tailored especially for the teachers working on the Assessment Committee. Iqbal also agreed with Raj and stated:

I have not attended any single Professional Development programme about assessment. I know that there was something for the Assessment Unit only. The administration only invited the people in the Assessment Unit, that's their choice. They thought that that was the right idea to develop the Testing Unit and they acted upon that

After that, teachers were asked why they thought they were not invited to attend any assessment-related PD Programmes, and teachers provided different reasons for their inability to join these assessment programmes. One reason was that the assessment workshop was really expensive and the institution cannot afford to send all the teachers to it. Raj was asked about this and stated:

they couldn't; it's because it is very expensive, I think. And it took place in the British Council. And it was offered to very few people. Now, these people can further train other teachers. I think, as I told you there is a big change in the system, and last year and this year things are getting better and very fast

However, according to some of the interviewed teachers, the assessment committee members who took part in the workshop for assessment never gave the remaining teachers any sort of Professional Development or workshop on assessment i.e. 'the cascade approach' to PD did not take place in this situation. Another reason was that general ELI teachers, those not working on any committees, are not really involved in the assessment process especially the summative assessment processes. Therefore, some teachers are arguing that there is no point of proper training in assessment if they are not going to use and practice the techniques they are learning. Moussa, for example states that "Yeah, I think that's maybe because of the Assessment Unit. They have got the unit so [...] why bother and waste the time of the remaining teachers while they are not

involved?”. Jamaal agreed with Moussa and also emphasised the fact that if they are not going to be using the assessment training, so why learn it in the first place? He said:

most of the things are already done for us and I don't have any power to change it, yeah. So even if I am properly trained in assessment there is no use, I'm not going use it all the tests and assessment is already done for us... There is a special unit for that

Ali disagreed and argued that there cannot be a single unit responsible for testing. He believed that it should be a joint collaboration between the curriculum unit and the testing unit. Therefore, limiting the training of assessment to only those in the Testing Unit does not really benefit the ELI: “I don't know how they have distributed the roles, but I cannot say that only the Testing Unit is in charge of the whole testing and assessment in the institution”. Therefore, from the data it could be seen that teachers were a bit frustrated and wanted the opportunity to develop themselves professionally. Teachers were aware that they wanted to keep up with the changing methodologies and learning approaches in English language teaching. Limiting this ambition to a specific number of teachers could really create an unhealthy and tension-filled environment, where inequality takes place and not all the teachers get the same opportunity to develop themselves professionally. Therefore, in the ELI conducting the assessment in a way that reflects and pours into the goals of the institution is an important issue. Students will only have faith in their marks if they can succeed in their future faculties otherwise their marks will mean nothing.

The next major theme in the data is concerned with the challenges that teachers are faced with when it comes to assessment in the ELI. This will be discussed in the following section.

## 5.3 Challenges

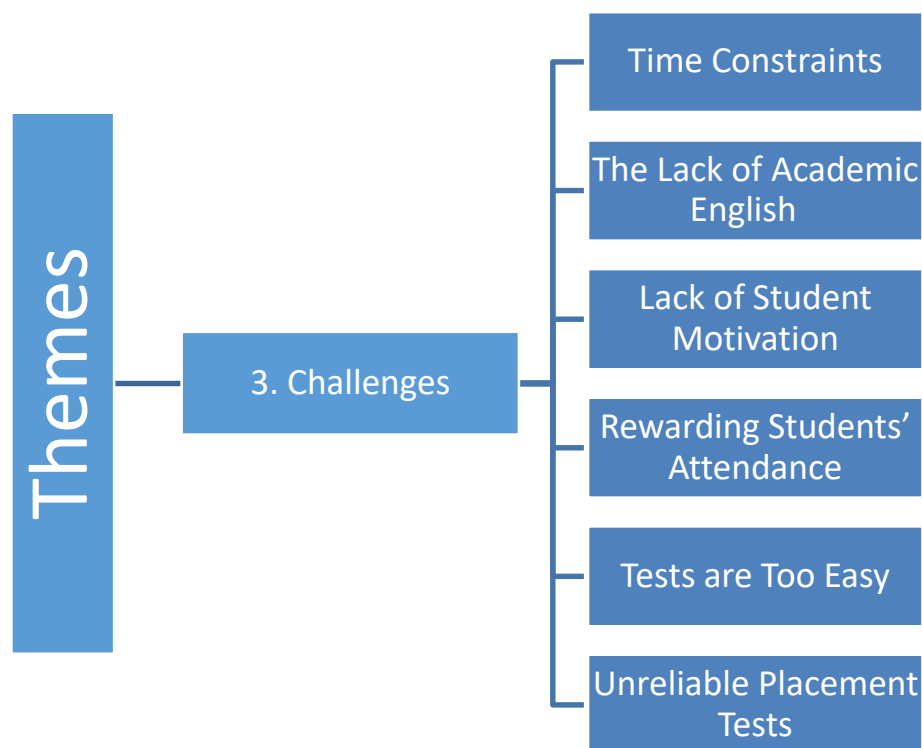


Figure 6: Themes & categories for challenges faced by teachers derived from the data analysis

This section will discuss the challenges that teachers in the ELI face when it comes to assessing their students, whether during summative or continuous assessment. In the data, several challenges have been raised by the teachers. The reported responses by the participants were classified –for data analysis purposes- into five main challenges faced by the teachers. They are: time constraints, the lack of academic English and EAP, student motivation, students' attendance, tests are too easy, unreliable placement tests.

### 5.3.1 Time Constraints: a teacher can barely keep up

A number of teachers which included Farooq, Rami and Zohir highlighted the issue of wanting to be more involved in the preparation and design of the students' assessment, but however, they justified their lack of involvement to time constraints and workload as the reasons for not being involved in the assessment. Farooq's interview is a clear example:

The teacher can barely keep up with the pacing guide and with the huge number of hours he has to teach each week. It is really difficult for us to be more involved in assessment. You see for the people in the assessment committee, they take some teaching load off of them, which enables them to be part of assessment

Zohir also highlighted the fact that teachers have a big work load in addition to that they are not allowed to get involved in assessment unless they are formally invited to be on the Assessment Committee. He clarifies:

I mean, let's be honest, even if they allowed us to participate in setting up assessments and writing tests, I really doubt that we would have the time with the workload we are allocated; I teach 24 hours a week, and sometimes more

During the interviews teachers were asked whether they were happy about not being involved in preparing the test of their students and whether if it is a good thing that this kind of responsibility is dedicated to a special committee. A large number of teachers indicated that they are in fact happy with this kind of separation and that preparing tests is a burden that has been removed from them.

Moussa indicated in his statement that the syllabus they have to teach is too long, and therefore, teachers have to cram everything in a short period of time:

Teachers have a very short time to complete their syllabus with this module system. I feel that with the current number of tests and . . . [continuous] assessments that students have to endure, we ought to go back to the term system. When you have your students for a whole term, you can really get somewhere with their learning. You get to know your students and therefore, know their weaknesses and strengths. Thereby, working more on their needs

In the ELI, teachers who are involved in the Assessment Committee are not given a full load of teaching hours. The institution recognises that the preparing of tests and assessments is time-consuming. Hence teachers involved are given a lighter load. From the data, it can be seen that teachers believe that their main priority is to teach their classes and that being involved in writing tests or involved in assessments came as a secondary objective that they did not mind if they had enough time.

### 5.3.2 The Lack of Academic English

Three of the teachers Saeed, Ali, and Medhat indicated that they were not satisfied with the way students are assessed due to the lack of Academic English taught to the students. Saeed clearly argued that his ELI students needed more Academic English than General English because:

students need to present in English in their departments and students also need to write their academic papers and assignments. For example, from experience I can tell you that now in the engineering school [where I teach English in-sessional courses] we find the same problem. This lot [of students] newly received this year, teachers believe that they are worse than before. This happen like every year. The graduates from the ELI are not really up to the academic standards of the Engineering School

On a contradictory note, Ali believed that, if the institution started assessing their students according to their future academic needs, this would then result in a mismatch between the assessment and the syllabus taught. The institution should try first to supplement their students with specific books according to their needs and then they will be able to assess them accordingly. He further explained this by saying:

We cannot assess our students according to their future needs. Remember we are teaching general English, it's not English for Academic Purposes or for Specific Purposes as it is the case in other maybe institutions. I have said that many occasions that students should be supplemented with another book or component that should be related to their future studies. So, I think that especially students of scientific colleges, students of Medicine, or students of Engineering should have some special material helping them cope in their future faculties. If we do that we can then change our assessment methods and content to match their needs in the future

The data also clearly revealed that not all teachers agree that students should be taught and assessed in academic English. For example, two teachers Moussa and Khan both indicated that students do not need academic English at this Foundation Year stage. They argued that General English was suitable for the level of their

students. That is to say, more speaking and conversation skills maybe introduced, instead of the grammar-heavy curriculum.

Moussa's interview is a clear indication that in the Foundation Year students should study General English because after they join their specific departments, each department will prepare its students according to their needs. He mentioned in his interview:

They [the ELI students] at this stage need General English, and Academic English could be introduced to them along with their own terminology when they join their different schools after the foundation year

Khan was somewhere in the middle with regards to teaching students Academic English or English for Specific Purposes. In his interview, he stated:

I feel that there should be General English, yes, 60% General English, 40% according to the needs and requirements of the students. ESP is completely missing now. We should really pay attention to that

From the data, it can be seen that teachers in the ELI do not agree on the content of the syllabus being taught to the students. A number of teachers believe that Foundation Year students in the ELI should be taught Academic English in order to prepare them for their future studies in their allocated colleges, while also a large number of teachers believe that with the current low proficiency level of students, General English is suitable as a starting point and Academic English should be introduced to them in their respective colleges in the future.

### **5.3.3 Lack of Student Motivation**

Nearly all of the teachers interviewed complained about students with low motivation or even no motivation at all to learn English. During the past few years, the institution and teachers tried to raise the level of motivation in various ways. Many Professional Development Programmes and workshops were initiated to help address this issue. From the teachers' point of view, students fell into two categories. Farooq explains that Medical and Engineering students have a high level of motivation. He added "You would find the students learning because they want to learn. They are always thirsty for more because they are really interested



in learning English". When it comes to the rest of the students, however another teacher- Raj- stated that unfortunately:

We are left with students who would either go to Islamic Studies, Business School, Law, or Humanities. These students have little motivation to learn the English language and it becomes very hard for the teacher because here students only learn because they want to pass the test at the end of the module. Students really don't care or want any long term learning

Eman also shed some light on the Woman's Section in the ELI clarifying that the situation is not much better. She said that students with high motivation to learn English were a minority, while the rest of them had no motivation due to a lack of interest:

When you don't like a language, when you actually dislike a language, you can't have the motivation to learn it. So, that is what is sad about it: that in spite of the fact that they are being taught and the teachers are doing their best to change this.

It can be seen that teachers were considering students' motivation as a challenge they needed to address. This low motivation results in students only interested in grades and passing the examination and not actually learning the language as we saw earlier in section (5.3.3). Some of the teachers were suggesting that, giving more attention to continuous assessment might help the students with their learning process. Students are motivated when they learn, year after year, their entire years' effort is given a lot less weight than the final exam and that they never get to learn about their mistakes in the final exam. This repeats every term and year and elevates student lack of motivation.

Despite the fact that they are only interested in passing the course, if students know that participating in continuous assessment and in the classroom is given more weight in marks than the summative assessment, this could result in students having no choice rather than to work hard and participate in the classroom in order to pass the module.

### 5.3.4 Rewarding Student Attendance

One of the challenges that teachers face is that the system rewards students for attending continuous assessment practices in the classroom. Ali argued that this should not be the case because simply attending a class should not entitle a student to getting marks. In his interview he stated:

I feel that it's a new way of assessment where students are assessed based on that attendance and completion of the task given. Of course all of them, all those who attended and sometimes who didn't attend would come at the end giving you the exercise and the tasks [...] with all the questions answered, expecting to get the full mark

Medhat also did not like the fact that if the student showed up for the reading assessment for example, he would get the full mark. He argued that for the students, it is like a game, where they make sure they attend the classes that have continuous assessment in them. At this point, we can see that teacher frustration with assessment mark allocation, which can impact academic quality and academic standards in the ELI. He further clarified:

So now the student understands the aim of the game [they say to themselves] simply I will show up and answer the questions and complete the answers and I will get the 5 [marks] straightaway. So he can take the workbook from any other colleague, from any other classroom then show up in the classroom and answer without doing the actual work

So, as seen from the quotes above, teachers in the institution are objecting to the rubric that simply awards students marks for showing up in a classroom. All of the teachers agreed that attending the class should not be an option. Many of them were unhappy with the allowed 25% absenteeism for students, complaining that most of the students, if not all, make sure that they make use of all of the 25% quota (allowance), which could hinder their learning process.

### 5.3.5 Tests are Too Easy

Wadee, Saeed and Jamal all believed that assessment in the English Language Institution was very easy. Wadee stated: "please note that the test by the way are very very easy, for all levels I mean. Look at the tests, take samples you would find

them very very easy". Jamal also agreed with Wadee and clarified that especially with the repeaters the institution sometimes takes extra measures to ensure that they pass the Foundation Year; he stated:

I've been facing this problem with a couple of classes... Especially the repeaters. Unfortunately, the institution lowers the level of the Final Assessment Examination in order for most of the students to pass. That shouldn't be the case... We want the students to learn something. And not just to pass the exams!

According to the data, and the ELI teachers, one of the challenges that teachers face in assessment in the ELI is that the institution is more interested in students getting good marks, rather than marks that reflect their actual level. According to them the evidence for that is that summative exams are very simple and easy; at the same time continuous assessment is not given much attention.

In this section and the previous one about teachers' role in assessment, I am starting to think that this issue can have disastrous consequences on student performance. Basically, the administration is limiting teacher involvement in summative assessment, but is also obligated to let students pass. This might be because the ELI needs to save face as students failing reflects very badly on the institution. Another reason could be that the ELI acknowledges the fact that not all students are going to be using English in their future studies especially those joining the arts/religious faculties in the university. So to mitigate that, the assessment committee is making tests very easy to avoid giving the authority for teachers to customise tests to their student needs and at the same time make sure students pass on to the next stage of education. All of which is not really beneficial either to the students or to the learning process in the institution.

#### **5.3.6 Unreliable Placement Tests**

A large number of teachers indicated that there is a problem with the placement tests that the students take at the beginning of each year. Teachers are complaining that students somehow fly through those placement tests and are not allocated to classes in their correct level sometimes. Eman clarified this by stating:

During my work in the institution, I have found that students with low level of English are allocated in level 3 or 4, for example.

Honestly, they are barely level 1, I really have no idea how they are scoring very well in the Placement Test

Another teacher, Afnan, suggested that the institution needs to examine and redevelop its Placement Tests. She stated that:

I think that the placement tests in the institution need to be re-examined, because they are not doing what they're meant to do, which is allocating students in their correct level. On many occasions, I had to deal with students who are either too advanced for their level or students who can barely keep up in the level they are allocated in

According to the data, placement tests are the first step that students have to take in the ELI institution. Therefore, it is very important for any institution to have a strong, rigorous placement test as this will help in the correct allocation of students, which will result in students benefiting the most from each level they have to study in the institution.

This finding about the inadequate administration, training and qualification of members within the assessment committee is an important one because the administration does not seem willing to give teachers more power to develop tests, neither does it provide them with the skills to improve testing and assessment.

## **5.4 Summary of Findings**

The following Table 5 summarises the major findings of this study in relation to their corresponding themes:

Table 5: Summary of Major Findings

THEME	#	FINDING
Teachers' Role(s)	1	Being a member of the Assessment Committee means having an active role in <b>Summative Assessment</b> .
	2	The inefficiency of <b>Summative</b> test bank management and fears over exam security may have resulted in limiting exam design efforts to the Assessment Committee.
	3	Despite Assessment Committee reasons for limiting teachers' roles in <b>Summative Assessment</b> , most teachers want to have a voice and be more involved.
	4	Not having a role in <b>Summative Assessment</b> design (or albeit a limited one) could make teachers feel powerless/ useless, which leads to lower job satisfaction and affects their self-image.
	5	Denying teachers access to completed <b>Summative Assessment</b> tests robs students of crucial learning opportunities through feedback.
	6	Despite teachers believing themselves to have a larger role in <b>Continuous Assessment</b> than in Summative assessment, they felt the need for more involvement in the choice of materials/ topics employed as well as more freedom regarding the way it is administered.
	7	Teachers' dissatisfaction with general mark distribution might reflect the mismatch of beliefs between them and administration regarding the importance of both Summative and <b>Continuous Assessment</b> in the overall learning process.
Teachers' Beliefs	8	Fear of being labelled negatively is one reason behind some teachers' reluctance to being more involved in assessment in general or voicing their views.
	11	Being a member of the <b>Assessment Committee</b> was viewed as a privilege and thus not having clear criteria for choosing its members was a cause of concern and discontentment among teachers.
	14	Because <b>PD courses</b> are expensive and time-consuming, they are limited to those on the Assessment Committee, which further exasperates the belief that those members are privileged and gives rise to a sense of unfairness among teachers.
	9	Teachers believed that there's a mismatch between tools used for assessment and student learning objectives, which needs to be addressed.
	12	Teachers agreed that an inclusive and proper comprehensive <b>Needs Analysis</b> is warranted in order to address all stakeholders' needs, including ELI, teachers, and students.
Challenges	13	Teachers believed that students' needs regarding language learning is not being met by the FYP and is causing a gap between what they are learning and being assessed on and what they require to succeed in their future faculties (the question of General vs. Academic English).
	15	Time constraints, content issues, student motivation, attendance, test levels, and placement tests were all challenges faced by teachers who suggest employing more of Continuous Assessment as a solution ( <b>Unhealthy Assessment Practices</b> ).
	16	Teachers suggest that one of the challenges they face in assessment is that the institution is more interested in giving students good marks than those that reflect their actual levels ( <b>Grade Inflation</b> ).

## 5.5 Conclusion

Certain conclusions can be drawn from this section, which if addressed correctly, can help limit the challenges teachers are facing in the ELI with regards to assessment. Teachers who are not involved in the assessment committee complain about having too many responsibilities and duties. This, in return, affects their abilities and capabilities in participating in assessment designing and implementation. The data also showed that teachers cannot assess their students according to their future academic needs due to the fact that the students are not being taught academic English and are only taught general English. A number of teachers also suggested the need for EAP as a substitute for the lack of academic English. Another challenge is that the teachers were facing was the lack of motivation of students to learn English and only concentrating on passing the exams. Essentially, teachers suggested addressing this issue by giving more importance and weight to the continuous assessment practices. Teachers also objected on the available rubric, which allows students to take marks just for attending the continuous assessment classes arguing that showing up for a class should not entitled students to get marks. Teachers have also complained about the summative assessments being too easy therefore not reflecting their actual level of the students. Finally, a large number of teachers argued that the institution suffers from unreliable placement tests, which resulted in students being regularly allocated in the wrong level. The following chapter will discuss those findings in light of the literature.

## Chapter Six: Discussion

This chapter discusses the key findings drawn from the analysis of the qualitative data collected in the course of the current study with a particular focus on the findings relating to the three aspects of the study: teachers' roles in assessment, teachers' beliefs concerning assessment, and finally the challenges faced by the teachers in terms of assessment. It should be noted that the rationale behind only discussing the following findings is because these major findings contribute the most to provide answers to the key questions of the study

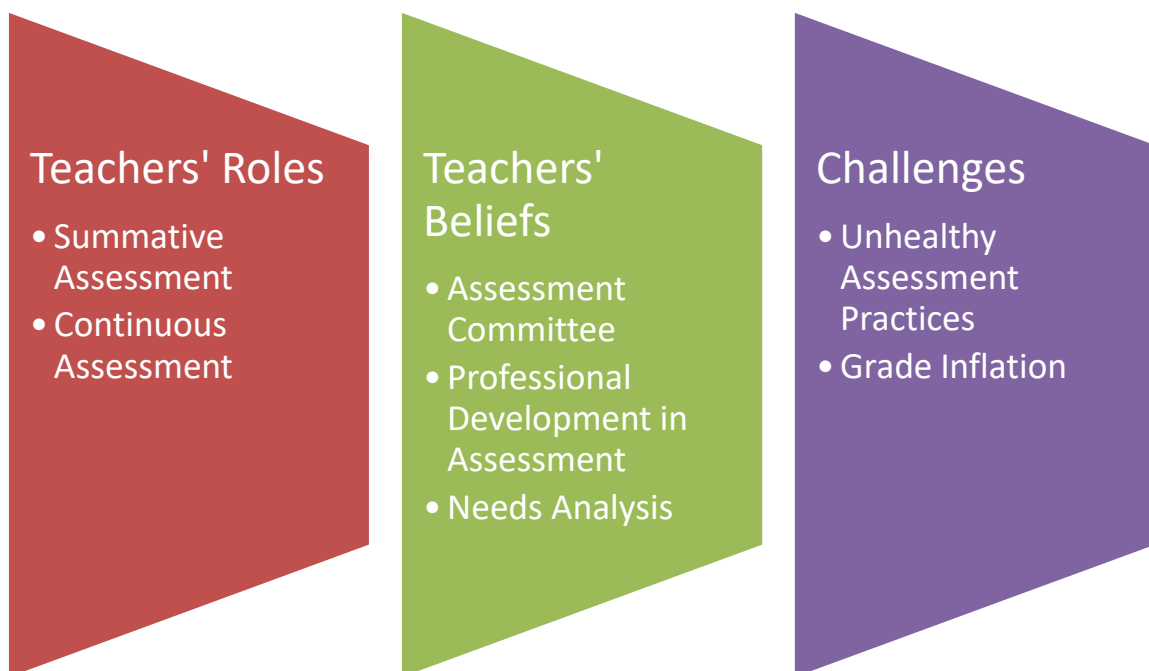


Figure 7: Discussed Themes

### 6.1 Teachers' Role(s) in Assessment

With regard to the teachers' roles in the development of summative assessment, one of the major findings of this study is that the teachers were divided into two groups. The first group is comprised of teachers working on the Assessment Committee, who felt satisfied with their role in all phases of the summative and continuous test development process since they were designing and writing the

tests for the entire institution. On the other hand, another group of teachers, the majority, viewed themselves as having no role in the test development process. These teachers only saw themselves as test administrators and/or invigilators. However, most of them did not perceive such roles as sufficient involvement in the test development process. Thus, being a member of the Assessment Committee meant having a full and active role in summative assessment in the ELI. It is important to note that teachers' understanding of test development seemed to be lacking in that they equated test design with test development. Thus their non-involvement in test design contributed to them feeling uninvolved in test development. However, test development has several stages, only one of which is test design. Saville (2003), explains that when developing summative assessments, the Cambridge ESOL test development model process passes through five main phases: (1) the planning phase, (2) the design phase, (3) the development phase, (4) the operational phase and (5) and the monitoring phase.

In the planning phase, teachers recognise that there is a perceived need for a test. Examples of this phase include, for example, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) that was produced by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) following a request from the Japanese Ministry for Trade and Industry and the Cambridge English: Business Certificates (BEC) suite, developed for the Chinese government (O'Sullivan, 2012). Similarly, tests in the ELI are developed and produced for the FYP with strict guidelines and schedules endorsed by the administration. In the design phase, the institution determines what is to be tested. A profile for the test population is developed, and then items and tasks are produced in accordance with the purpose of the test and the type of language to be tested. The development phase includes deciding on the number of items to be included in the test, taking into consideration teachers' knowledge of the students and the time available. This phase concentrates on ensuring that the items and types of tasks are suitable in order to produce a reliable test. For the operational phase, the administration of the test is taken into consideration, such as, for instance, the timing of the test and designing a clear rubric ensuring that the test has easy and clear instructions. The monitoring phase happens after administering the test by taking feedback from the teachers and the students. This phase is



important in summative assessment mainly, to inform the institution that the test has been adequately performed; however, this phase is not of significant importance in formative assessment as teachers can immediately notice in the classroom if an item is too difficult, too easy or unsuitable (O'Sullivan, 2012).

According to the above-mentioned phases adapted from O'Sullivan (2012), the ELI teachers on the Assessment Committee are involved in all of the previous five stages, whereas teachers who are not on the Assessment Committee are only involved in the fourth 'operational phase' of the test development process –i.e. the administration of the tests. However, for this group of teachers, simply being involved in the operational phase did not seem enough. Not having a role in summative assessment design (or albeit a limited one) made teachers feel powerless or useless, which leads to lower job satisfaction and affects their self-image. It could also lead to them feeling that they are not trustworthy, which will in turn negatively affect the institution as a whole. Therefore, I am arguing that trusting teachers to perform assessment duties as well as other duties is likely to increase teachers' job satisfaction. This is in line with Usop, Askandar, Langguyuan-Kadtong and Usop, (2013) who suggest in their study conducted on 200 teachers in the Philippines, that the more teachers have freedom and authority to perform their duties, the more they are satisfied with their jobs and are capable of developing and maintaining a high level of performance. This study argues that giving teachers a larger role in summative assessment will help make the teaching and learning process more efficient and effective, which will hopefully produce better learners.

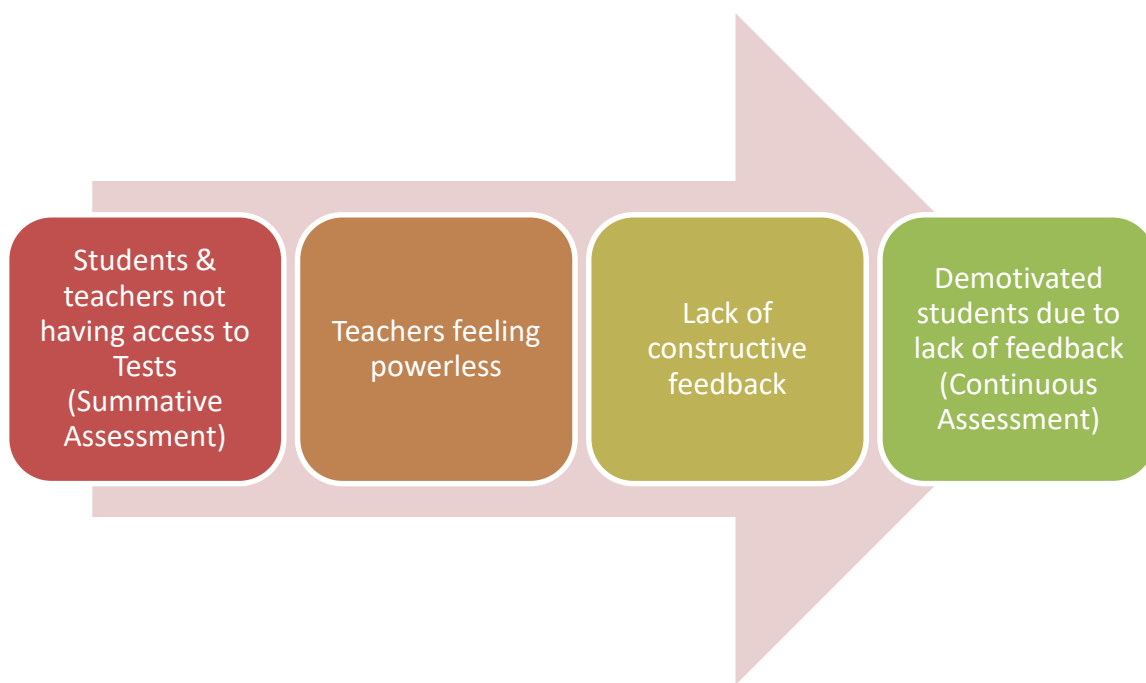
Another finding of this study was that the inefficiency of summative test bank management and fears over exam security may have resulted in discarding the test bank and limiting exam design efforts to those on the Assessment Committee. From the institution's point of view, limiting the number of people involved in the assessment process increases the security of the tests, which contributes to their validity and reliability and consequently benefits the students and the institution as well. The study acknowledges the fact that previously in the ELI, there was a sense of involvement among the teachers through the use of the 'Test Bank', a digital bank of test questions to which each teacher in the ELI was required to contribute

by writing test items. At that time, it was believed that this gave teachers the opportunity to play a role in the design of the summative assessment in the institution. It should be noted, however, that this bank ceased to exist as it has been deemed ineffective by the ELI administration because of a considerable amount of irrelevant and poor quality test items. This also meant that this test bank system proved to be impractical because not every teacher in the institution can be considered assessment literate or able to produce adequate test items. In this regard, Fulcher and Davidson (2007) advocate 'item banking', which involves reviewing a great number of test items and selecting the best items to be banked or stored in a digital format, which allows for easy retraction according to specific search criteria. Currently, in the ELI this is carried out by members of the Assessment Committee, who also design and produce the tests used in the summative assessment. Therefore, in order to have an effective and productive 'test bank', teachers need to be prepared and trained to produce high-quality items (Popham, 2004).

Fears over exam security resulted not only in limiting teachers' access to summative exams during the design stage, but also denied them access to student exam papers afterwards. The study also found that despite the administration's reasons for limiting teachers' roles in summative assessment, most teachers wanted to have a voice and be more involved in all stages of the process. Denying teachers access to summative tests robs students of crucial learning opportunities through feedback. One of the main roles of the teachers within the institution is to prepare the students for the tests; however, as showed the data strongly suggest, it appears that teachers have been complaining that this role had been compromised due to their limited access to the tests until the day of the final or mid-term exam itself. This, in turn, seems to be limiting their ability to adequately prepare their students for the examinations as well as discussing their mistakes with them through constructive feedback afterwards. Therefore, it appears clear that the ELI administration has total control over assessment and, to a certain extent, marginalises mainstream teachers. This finding echoes Shohamy's (2006) claim that in testing "there will always be those who will try to take control and avoid democratic processes". Thus, it could be argued that further involvement of

the teachers in assessment and decision-making within the ELI, may empower them and enhance the learning process as well. Similarly, Troudi et al. (2009) examined the roles of teachers in assessment within an EFL context in the Gulf region and concluded that teachers feel they have little voice in this matter. Based on the previous argument and according to the findings, this study argues that giving teachers more power and allowing them to gain access to their students' mistakes in both summative and continuous assessments would enable them to better prepare continuous assessment activities. In doing so, teachers are able to give proper feedback on students' continuous assessment, all of which would contribute to an enhanced teaching and learning environment within any educational institution.

Another issue regarding teachers' lack of access to the tests relates to their belief that the motivation of their students is affected insofar as they felt they were not well-prepared for the tests. Teachers reported that their students always have numerous questions about the exams to which they could not provide answers as teachers were kept in the dark about the content of the summative assessment exams. This also contributed to a feeling of powerlessness among the teachers, because they could not address most of their students' queries about the examinations. In my opinion, this can result in students feeling less motivated to take part in continuous assessment since they have no clear idea how they are performing in their summative exams, which carry a larger percentage of their total grade. This is also frustrating for the teacher who is continuously trying to motivate students to participate in the classroom. Therefore, it may be asserted that not having access to summative assessment is indirectly negatively affecting continuous assessment as well. Such limited access to the tests resulted in teachers feeling powerless for not being able to deliver constructive feedback, which in turn can make the students frustrated and demotivated to participate in the classroom, thereby affecting continuous assessment as well. The figure below is an attempt to illustrate this connection.



**Figure 8: Teachers' limited access to tests affecting Continuous Assessment in the classroom**

Indeed, feedback facilitates learning whereby, even negative feedback, has proven to provide students with new learning opportunities (McDonough, 2005). However, the ELI teachers are being deprived from giving proper feedback because, just like their students, they do not have access to above-mentioned exams. Unfortunately, this could jeopardise the quality and efficiency of the whole testing process in the ELI. Although nowadays the idea that tests need to be computerised with very limited access to the exam results has been generally accepted in all Saudi universities, including where the study was conducted. This is not specific to language education as this is wide spread in other disciplines as well; and it reflects very little understanding of what educational assessment is about. Therefore, I would like to argue that, especially in language learning, the access to tests and exams is quite an important issue and an optimal learning opportunity for students.

According to Vogt and Tsagari (2014), ELT teachers should be able to deal with standardised assessment as well as classroom assessment. This is another reason for advocating the necessity and importance of having assessment literate

teachers capable to deliver proper detailed feedback on the student's strengths and weaknesses in a test. This in turn can certainly help in maintaining high levels of student's motivation and, therefore, impact positively on their performance in the future. Furthermore, the issue of power and teachers feeling marginalised is also present here, which is an issue that requires attention as well. According to Inbar-Lourie (2008, p.387) the teacher's role is "*geared to formulating and scaffolding learning on the basis of ongoing feedback from internal and external assessment sources*". In order to do this, teachers need to be able to provide proper feedback to the students by having access to the results, hence ensuring that they use 'assessment for learning' and make use of the results to better prepare their lessons and address their students' needs.

When it comes to continuous assessment, this study found that ELI teachers favour the use of continuous assessment over summative assessment arguing that this could enable them to address students' future academic needs. This is in line with the idea that teachers generally favour the use of informal and flexible methods of assessment, such as observations, corrective feedback or the recycling of work, over formal tests (Brindley, 1989; Mavrommatis, 1997; and Stiggins & Conklin, 1992). In addition, Miller and Legg (1993) state that the advocates of the shift towards alternative assessment claim that the use of other performance-based assessment measures encourages instructional techniques that enhance the learners' critical thinking and problem solving skills. For Kuhn (1970), the differences between the psychometric thinking behind summative assessment and the longitudinal thinking behind classroom assessment for learning are incommensurable. However, Teasdale and Leung (2000) disagree with this idea claiming that the above two sets of beliefs can coexist smoothly. In fact, a positive correlation was identified between formative assessment and performance on summative assessment tasks in a number of studies (Sly, 1999; and Sly & Rennie, 1999). However, the studies were limited to computerised practice tests.

In this study, teachers also reported that they felt they had an active role in continuous assessment; however, close examination of the data suggests that this role was limited. Feeling that they had an active role was only due to the fact that they were comparing it to their role in summative assessment. This was evident in

their quest for flexibility in conducting continuous assessment. So, despite teachers believing themselves to have a larger role in continuous assessment than in summative assessment, they felt the need for more involvement in the choice of materials/ topics employed as well as more freedom regarding the way it is administered inside the classroom. The data demonstrated that teachers seem to generally agree on the idea that they should be given more control and freedom when assessing their own students in the classroom as this relates to their future academic needs. The findings also revealed that all aspects of the continuous assessment are dictated by the institution and teachers have no control over when or how to conduct them. However, it is evident that the institution is reluctant to grant such power to the teachers due the fact that the FYP deals with a large number of EFL teachers. According to the administration, for reasons of efficiency, practicality and reliability, assessment needs to be centrally managed under the responsibility of only one Assessment Committee. This, however, would limit the number of teachers involved in the decision-making process relating to continuous assessment. As a result, such a rigid security system could affect the remaining teachers negatively. According to Troudi et al. (2009), who conducted a study in a similar context in the Gulf area, this element of security is likely to cause “*many teachers to feel distrusted and disrespected*” (p.550). The data also revealed that teachers’ role in continuous assessment has been decreasing and getting even more restricted with time. This limited role not only affects the teachers, but also the students as they do not have any access to their exam papers so they cannot see their mistakes. Such a feeling among a majority of teachers most certainly appears to be a major drawback for the institution and an issue that needs to be addressed urgently. Therefore, as this relates to continuous assessment, it is highly possible for the ELI to find the right balance between the teachers’ level of freedom to assess their students and the security and integrity of the graded continuous assessment tests. The above issues could be attributed to the ELI top-down assessment policy. On the other hand, teachers argued that they are the ones who best understand their students’ needs, which means that they are in a position to determine the amount, level and variety of continuous assessment needed for each classroom. This study argues for a higher degree of control and freedom be given to the teachers given that they are in the best position to

determine the pace of the lessons as well as their students' needs. If the teachers were given freedom and control over the assessment practices that take place in the classroom, this would enable them to provide immediate feedback thereby enhancing their role in assessment and in the students' learning process.

Not only were teachers dissatisfied with their limited role in both summative and continuous assessment, but they criticised the general marks allocated to each type of assessment. Teachers' dissatisfaction with general mark distribution might reflect a mismatch of beliefs between them and the administration regarding the importance of both summative and continuous assessment in the overall learning process. Currently, teachers in the ELI only mark and grade 20% of their students' total assessment; therefore, allowing teachers to contribute actively to their students' assessment would certainly help them perceive themselves as having a more active role in assessment in general and in continuous assessment in the classroom in particular. Having said that, one problematic area in classroom assessment is that the ELI teacher plays the role of assessor in continuous assessment but shifts to the role of invigilator or an interlocutor in summative assessment. Therefore, it could be argued here that the psychometric theory used in summative assessment is not an appropriate framework for continuous assessment in the classroom. Likewise, this suggests that teachers need to be aware of this difference to enable them to shift between frameworks and shift between assessment roles. Rea-Dickins and Gardner (2000) examined continuous assessment practices in nine schools and suggest that when it is graded, it becomes a high-stakes assessment for the students, which in turn can have serious negative consequences for the learning process. In the ELI, continuous assessment is allocated specific grades and is conducted in a specific time and date, this suggests that the criteria implemented on continuous assessment is the same one as summative assessment. This should not be the case as Teasdale and Leung (2000) argue that the assessment criteria used in summative assessments are not the appropriate criteria for classroom continuous assessment and they clarify three main factors, which contribute to the difficulties in administering continuous assessment in the classroom. First, in the educational setting, assessment does not form a strong element of professional culture as

teachers view their role first and foremost as being concerned with teaching, while assessment is seen as something that can be done as part of the job. In addition, the issue of funding is a significant factor whereby continuous assessment is usually allocated very little or insufficient funding. With regard this study, it could be argued that the ELI administration allocates its funding to crucial parts of the educational system. However, funding for professionally developing teachers in assessment is left behind, which suggests a lack of awareness within the ELI with respect to the importance of maintaining a balanced funding allocation for both types of assessment, summative and continuous assessments. Finally, the third reason relates to the degree to which educational systems are aware and prepared to implement such practices. For example, continuous assessment requires a long-term commitment, which means that, to be adequately performed, continuous assessment needs teachers that are trained and familiar with the assessment procedures in order to ensure that they are practised with the students and get the chance to settle in (Teasdale and Leung, 2000). According to the data, it seems that the ELI does in fact face the above same obstacles. However, this could also be attributed to their lack of interest to invest in the necessary resources that allow continuous assessment to be properly performed and in line with the course objectives and goals.

One possible reason for the mismatch between teachers' and administration ideas over total grade allocation for different types of assessment is that the distinction between assessment for learning and assessment for achievement is not very clear. Teasdale and Leung (2000, p.178) conclude that such a lack of clarity between these two different assessment purposes in addition to the continuous shift in roles that the teacher needs to perform to address both purposes are all reasons why "assessment issues have been submerged into routine teaching practice and treated largely as unproblematic". To avoid similar problems, assessment in the ELI should not focus only on the summative assessment. Bachman (1990) points out that the feedback provided to the students based on their tests can potentially improve teaching and learning outcomes in addition to the educational process. Likewise, according to Teasdale and Leung (2000), the difference between continuous and summative assessments relates to the quantity



of each one of them; they argue that everyday classroom assessment activities provide small quantities of information which can be used in summative assessment. On the other hand, Teasdale and Leung (2000) advocate against marking any type of classroom assessment as they state that “*the use of formative assessment for summative purposes may jeopardise the whole process [of learning]*”. On the same line of argument, Sadler (1989, p.141) believes that classroom assessment is not suitable to function formatively because students may feel that their collective grades throughout the term do not really impact their final grade. However, it is evident from the data that the ELI has already committed this mistake as teachers were complaining about the fact that unmarked classroom activities cause students to lose interest in the lesson and reduce their participation. Therefore, it could be argued that in continuous assessment, giving the teacher more weight in marks will hopefully encourage the students to participate in the classroom. As far as the previous argument regarding teachers feeling of gradual loss of role is concerned, it is noticeable that in the past, teachers marked their students’ exams on paper and had the opportunity to provide individual and constructive feedback to each student. This suggests that they had a more active role in the assessment of their students because they could actually look back on the answers and discuss their students’ mistakes with them. In regard to this point, Irons (2007) and Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2002) emphasise on the fact that it is essential to give students an opportunity to receive formative feedback on their progress before they encounter the actual summative test.

In summary, teachers’ role(s) in assessment is a complex notion from a constructivist, contextually-situated framework which accounts for the internalisation of assumptions and beliefs about assessment as a social practice and a social product (Filer, 2000). The idea of tests as a product has a significant impact on both teachers and students in the institution as demonstrated by several findings derived from the data. Thus, the administration needs to be aware of this impact and act accordingly as it is important to strike the correct balance between all the roles that teachers can play in assessment. Failing to do so could lead to complications with regards teachers’ roles in the institution as a whole. Such

difficulties have been recognised by a number of scholars including Rea-Dickins (2007) and Inbar-Lourie (2008) who argue that teachers have to deal with performing multiple roles at the same time. Therefore, “Good teachers know how they must assess their students’ learning [...] and they want to do it well” (Mapstone, 1996, p.2). They all advocate for teachers performing multiple duties including the duty of teachers assessing students’ competence.

Prior to starting this study, I believed that all ELI teachers should be involved in assessment in one way or another as I felt that it was not fair that only a selected few in the institution could influence the tests and assessment practices. However, conducting this research and being increasingly aware of good practice in assessment in addition to being more informed with regards the relevant literature, I now feel that assessment is an issue that needs to be addressed by specifically trained individuals or a group of skilled teachers within the institution, such as the assessment committee. The image of the institution where every teacher can and will participate in all phases of assessment might in reality be impractical, unrealistic and unfeasible.

Although this study is arguing for empowering teachers in assessment, it is impractical and unrealistic to expect that all the teachers in any language institution would actually want to be involved in assessment. Assessment should not be imposed on teachers, but rather the policy should enable teachers who are assessment literate or want to be assessment literate to have the capability to be involved. This can only take place by having clear transparent criteria to joining the Assessment Committee, and even if the teachers do not want to join the committee, but still want to help and get involved in assessment, there should be a clear procedure that would enable them to have a voice that reaches the committee without any repercussions against them as teachers.

## **6.2 Teachers’ Beliefs on Assessment**

Following the above discussion on the ELI teachers’ perceived roles in assessment, it seems important to address the issues that pertain to their general beliefs about assessment in order to determine whether their roles are in harmony with these beliefs and if they affect their assessment practices.

The data showed that the fear of being labelled negatively is one reason behind some teachers' reluctance to being more involved in assessment in general or voicing their views. It seems that the ELI educational policy with regards to assessment is not well receptive of criticism. Findings of this study revealed that the teachers who complained or raised certain objections about a test or an assessment policy were considered 'troublemakers'. Based on this aspect of the data, this study argues for the implementation of critical language testing principles, which will benefit the institution greatly as they advocate democracy in decision-making and recognise that tests are an easily misused tool (Shohamy, 2001). In this regard, according to McNamara (2000), "language testing, as a quintessentially institutional activity, is facing increasing scrutiny from this perspective" (p.76). This, according to him, suggests that because the common practices in language testing have been known to favour those in power, radical changes are needed in order to give the powerless –in this case the 'mainstream teacher' in the institution– a voice in assessment and testing. In addition, this study advocates that the mainstream teacher dealing with the students on a regular basis should be considered an invaluable resource for formative, continuous, and summative assessment. It could be suggested that this form of teacher empowerment can also be applied to other disciplines at this university, as well as universities in the Gulf Region.

Having a voice or being able to criticise the assessment practices in the ELI could be considered the first step in the empowerment of teachers, while the ability to apply to join the Assessment Committee would be another positive step. This is important because being a member of the Assessment Committee was viewed as a privilege and thus not having clear criteria for choosing its members was a cause of concern and discontentment among teachers. Not all teachers can be involved in assessment; as not all of them want to; therefore, it is suggested that having clear criteria when choosing members of the assessment committee would be the first step in empowering the mainstream teacher and giving him a voice in assessment. The arbitrary nature of the selection of teachers on that committee remains a crucial issue that lacks adequate criteria. The mainstream teacher does not know how this selection is conducted and it should also be noted that teachers

have no choice in the selection of testing committee members. Committee members are designated in a top down manner as there is no official procedure to be part of this committee. This idea is also corroborated by the fact that teachers viewed the involvement in this committee as a privilege. Indeed, teachers are directly chosen by the ELI higher administration and according to non-transparent criteria; rather, being part of the committee meant fewer teaching hours and financial compensation. Nevertheless, the selection of the committee members remains a top-down procedure since it seems that the administration chooses teachers whom they believe to be trustworthy enough to be on the committee, however, their definition of 'trustworthy' is unclear and remains unexplained to those not being chosen. This finding seems to agree with Brindley (2001) and McNamara (2001) who point out that teachers sometimes tend to have problems with their assessment practices due to conflicts of different assessment cultures. This unfortunately resulted in teachers, especially those eager to be involved in assessment, feeling disgruntled and generally unsatisfied. Thus, the ELI needs to establish clear and transparent criteria for assigning teachers not only to the Assessment Committee, but also to the other committees available in the ELI.

Having teachers who could voice their opinions on assessment practices and who are qualified to apply to join the Assessment Committee necessitates that they are trained to carry out their duties effectively. However, because PD courses are expensive and time-consuming for the ELI, they are limited to those on the Assessment committee, which further exasperates the belief that those members are privileged and gives rise to a sense of unfairness among teachers. According to the teachers in this study, PD courses in the ELI lack the assessment element as the data showed that teachers could only remember one PD course provided in assessment. However, it should be noted that such a course had only been offered to specifically selected teachers within the Assessment Committee. The data revealed that as far as the issue of professional development in assessment is concerned, two groups of teachers can be identified. The first group of teachers believed that PD courses were needed for all teachers in order to abolish assessment literacy and raise the awareness of teachers concerning language assessment. For the second group, not all teachers were in need of such courses;

rather, they should only be provided to teachers who are involved in assessment to enable them to conduct their assessment committee duties properly. Such findings seem to suggest that not all teachers are actually eager to receive professional training in assessment. This particular aspect has been discussed in the literature as it has been argued that a number of barriers hamper the teachers' involvement in PD programmes in assessment and assessment literacy (Stiggins, 1995). Other researchers such as Coombe et al. (2012) refer to these barriers as 'impediments of assessment literacy' and argue that a fear of assessment has developed through unpleasant assessment practices encountered by the teachers themselves. They add that a great number of the assessment materials and journals are quite technical and complicated for the average language teacher who sometimes has a heavy workload or simply not interested in assessment because it is convenient to have someone else doing it. Finally, Coombe et al. (2012) also reveal that with respect to the Gulf countries, the resources allocated to assessment literacy are sometimes limited and scarce. Similar findings have been reported in a study by Brumen and Cagran, (2011) conducted among 108 teachers in the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Croatia that found that the majority of teachers did not receive additional teacher training in assessment, while showing a great desire for more teacher training in assessing learners. This finding was thought to be attributed to the fact that, in these countries, resources are limited and such courses are very costly (Brumen & Cagran, 2011). However, in my opinion this does not seem to be the case in Saudi Arabia as universities are funded by the government and the financial resources are quite generous and available. This means that language institutions who could afford to provide faculty members with PD programmes focussing on assessment should do so. However, gaining approval for such programmes is not easy and decision-makers need to be convinced by being made aware of the importance and necessity of such programmes in order to approve funding and implementation. If this was not possible, institutions should strictly implement the 'cascade approach', where those who were offered the PD courses should provide workshops for the rest of the teachers thereby improving assessment literacy for a larger number of teachers.

Providing proper PD training to teachers could not only improve assessment literacy, but also be the solution to solving the gap between curriculum and assessment. Teachers believed students' needs regarding language learning is not being met by the FYP and is causing a gap between what they are learning and being assessed on and what they require to succeed in their future faculties. In the ELI, two separate units have been dedicated for curriculum and assessment; however, the findings pointed to a certain belief among the teachers that assessment should be part of the Curriculum Unit. It is interesting to note that with regard to this point, Carr (2011) differentiates between two types of tests: curriculum-related tests and non-curriculum-related tests. Tests available in the institution are all curriculum-related tests, starting with everyday continuous assessment in addition to the mid-term progress test and ending with the final achievement test (not including the placement test). In the ELI, this correlation between assessment and curriculum is clear as the teacher's pacing guide plans the chapters that need to be covered within a specific timeframe in order to ensure that items included in the tests are covered in those chapters. This strong correlation between assessment and curriculum could justify the argument that the Assessment Unit and the Curriculum Unit in the ELI need to work in harmony or even become one unit with different sub-units. Another suggested justification for the merge is that the policy in the ELI advocates and encourages Assessment for Learning (according to the ELI Handbook and interviews with teachers in the Curriculum Unit), while in reality most of the assessment taking place in the ELI is Assessment for Achievement, which could be attributed to security and standardisation issues. However, Waugh and Gronlund (2013) strongly support that assessment of students' achievement plays an essential role in the curriculum and that one of the main objectives of assessment is to improve learning. Another reason why assessment and curriculum should be together under one unit is that there is a significant mismatch between curriculum objectives that emphasise students' productive skills and the way students are assessed since more than 60% of the assessment –both summative and continuous– focuses on receptive skills. The ELI Handbook (Kinsara, 2011) along with teachers' beliefs from this study both indicate that it is important for students to learn productive skills for their future studies, while they are assessed mainly on their receptive skills. It is

important to note that when students finish the foundation year, they are expected to write essays and deliver presentations in English in their future chosen disciplines. Therefore, assessment in the ELI should aim to measure those skills and not only focus on skills like reading, listening and grammar use.

Giving teachers a voice, reforming the Assessment Committee, offering PD courses, and joining the two units requires an in-depth look at the assessment practices taking part in the ELI. Teachers agreed that an inclusive and proper comprehensive needs analysis is warranted in order to address all stakeholders' needs, including ELI, teachers, and students. Based on this, the current study suggests applying the Constructive Alignment Theory introduced by Biggs (1996), who argued for the merging of constructivism with instructional design.

Constructivism establishes a specific framework for understanding how students learn in addition to how teachers ought to address the challenges by implementing in the classroom instructional methods inspired from constructivist principles. This type of knowledge is derived from the types of teaching and learning activities, as well as what the learners bring to their learning environment, such as their previous knowledge, experiences, attitudes and assumptions (Lawrence & Snyder, 2009). To achieve this, the teachers working on the curriculum need to “*translate curricular content and learning objectives into course materials and teaching/ learning activities [...] by aligning learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment of learning*”. Lawrence and Snyder (2009) also warn that if assessment is not aligned with the curriculum and the learning objectives, this could hinder the learning process greatly. Conducting proper needs analysis with the main stakeholders would definitely help.

Greenburg (2012) recognises this gap between assessment practices that take place in language institutions and other practices that are needed in the workplace. He argues that “means analysis is essential for identifying learning outcomes” (p. 178). Furthermore, as the data suggest, teachers in the ELI expressed concerns about the fact that their classroom teaching has become narrowed down to what the students need for the test, which involves wasting valuable instructional time on mainly test preparation activities. However, reforming continuous assessment by giving it more weight and importance could help in reducing this problem. It is

important that both formal and informal measures be used to assess the language abilities of students (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). Miller and Legg (1993), note that continuous assessment helps bridging the gap between curriculum and instruction. They also add that with respect to continuous assessment, the scoring methods play an important role in the validity of the results; in other words, when the tasks are complex, the learners need to understand exactly how each task will be scored. However, Miller and Legg also warned that when the scoring procedures are precisely defined, there is always a risk of students memorising acceptable responses instead of using higher-order thinking skills to solve problems.

The data showed that teachers believed that there is no agreement between assessment and curriculum in the ELI since students are assessed on general English while they actually need academic English for their future studies. A group of teachers were advocating the introduction of academic English or EAP to students while others believed that at this stage only general English was needed. According to Martyniuk, Fleming and Noijons (2007, p.7), *“assessment designers should ‘negotiate’ with curriculum developers when attainment targets (competence standards) are being turned into assessment tasks and items”*. Thus it could be argued that assessment policy in the institution is not guided by the students’ needs. Conducting a proper and thorough needs analysis would definitely help in addressing this issue.

### **6.3 Challenges Faced by Teachers**

After having discussed the roles and beliefs of the ELI teachers with regards assessment, it appears that there are several challenges that teachers face. It seems that teachers’ roles in assessment in the ELI seem to be in contradiction with their beliefs about assessment; thus providing them with several challenges regarding those practices. Two of those challenges are unhealthy assessment practices and grade inflation.



### **6.3.1 Unhealthy Assessment Practices**

Time constraints, content issues, student motivation, attendance, test levels and placement tests were all challenges faced by teachers who suggested employing more of continuous assessment as a solution.

#### **6.3.1.1 Excessive Assessment**

One of the challenges that teachers are facing in the institution is the fact that there are too many assessment exams taking place in the ELI, thus it could be argued that too much assessment results in teachers being in consistent exam preparation mode. I argue that although the amount of tests was reduced actual learning is still kept to the minimum because succeeding in these tests is considered by the teachers and the students a high priority. It seems that the ELI testing policy is causing a feeling of dissatisfaction among the teachers. Having too many tests in the programme is making teachers unhappy with this practice as well as affecting teaching and learning in the ELI. This challenge which relates to assessment and testing has been discussed by Shohamy (2001) who argues that tests have remarkable power in any educational settings and it is natural to experience some problems related to their execution. I am arguing here that the ELI, much like other institutions in the gulf area, like Torrance and Pryor (1995) describe, has undesirably replaced formative assessment and assessment for learning with frequent (continuous) and extensive summative assessments instead.

In this study, the findings suggest that teachers still consider assessment to be used extensively in the institution. This issue excessive assessment is likely to be experienced by other universities in Saudi Arabia as they all have the FYP in place. Biggs (1996) argues that inappropriate testing can have a negative impact on student learning. However, with regards the ELI, it seems that the educational policymakers still believe that the more assessment students have to endure, the more pressure students will feel to rise up to the standards and work harder, thus resulting in better learning in the institution. Carless, Joughin and Liu (2006) disagree and clarify that sometimes “assessment can distort the learning process, [...] it can lead to some important topics being neglected by students, whilst others are afforded undue importance” (p.4).

Another finding was that the ELI have made some aspects of continuous assessment in the classroom as graded. It should be noted that 80% of the marks are allocated to summative assessments (one mid-module examination, one final examination, one speaking examination, and one writing examination); however, the remaining 20% are allocated to continuous assessment. It could be argued here that by grading the continuous assessment, the institution is encouraging students to participate and engage in the classroom. However, at the same time, this could be blocking opportunities for students to express their understanding in their own ways because they want to give the answers that the teachers expect them to provide according to the exam rubrics. When teachers limit the use of the rubrics during graded continuous assessments to themselves, it makes them expect limited/ particular response from their students. This will, according to Black and William (1998), prevent any “unusual, often thoughtful but unorthodox, attempts by the pupils to work on their own answers” (p.11). This is supported by a study conducted in a similar context, i.e. Lebanon, which found that the use of those rubrics helped students in a positive way to revise their written drafts in an EFL course (Diab & Balaa, 2011). Therefore, if the rubrics are shared with students, it is quite likely that formative assessment will encourage interaction and negotiation between student and teacher and this will result in aiding learning (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007).

Nonetheless, any language institution should aim to utilise formative, continuous and summative assessment strategies to achieve the goals required for their learners. This goes in line with Hanna and Dettmer (2004), who also argue that institutions should strive to develop a range of assessments strategies that match all aspects of their instructional plans. They propose that instead of trying to differentiate between formative and summative assessments, it may be more beneficial to start planning assessment strategies to work in alignment with instructional goals and objectives at the beginning of the semester and continue implementing them throughout the entire teaching and learning experience (Davison & Leung, 2009).

### **6.3.1.2 Low Student Motivation**

One of the challenges raised by the teachers was the students' low level of motivation, which resulted in a huge washback effect whereby teachers were continuously forced by the students to prepare them for the exams due to the fact that they can only engage with their unmotivated students when they are preparing them for the tests (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). Washback does not only affect the teachers, it also affects the students and the language learning process as a whole (Shohamy, 2001; and Weir, 1990). Wall and Alderson (1996) argue that it forces teachers to focus on teaching for the test while neglecting issues that will not be covered in the test. Focusing on the test might get the unmotivated students more motivated and engaged in the classroom; however, this will also have a negative impact on the motivated students as it will not only lower the quality of language learning in the classroom, but also the level of whole educational setting (Hughes, 2003; and Messick, 1996). Hence, the study argues that when continuous assessment takes place in Saudi universities, teachers and students become part of the assessment process, positive washback will occur and students will get more motivated as ongoing assessment "encourages students to work consistently; provides important data for evaluation of teaching and assessment practices in general" (Davison & Leung, 2009, p.402).

Another reason affecting the level of motivation of the students is the fact that there is a large amount of summative assessment that is taking place in the institution. This strong focus on summative assessment means that there is a large percentage of marks dedicated to summative assessment in the ELI. Therefore, students are only motivated to pass the summative test in order to be able to join their chosen faculties. As continuous assessment represents only 20% of the final mark since don't feel motivated enough to participate in the classroom. This study is arguing for more weight to be allocated to continuous assessment. This is very likely to encourage unmotivated students –as well as the motivated ones– to get involved in the classroom and consequently learn the language at the same time. Lowering the amount of grades allocated to summative assessment and raising the amount of continuous assessment would encourage students to be more proactive and involved in the classroom, which in turn provides a better

learning experience. This suggestion is supported by the literature as there is a strong body of evidence to support that raising the level and amount of continuous assessment enhances the standards of learning (Black & William, 1998; and Black et al., 2002).

#### **6.3.1.3 Excessive use of MCQs**

The ELI's excessive use of MCQs plays an important role in the mismatch between the curriculum objectives and assessment practices in the ELI where students need to produce essays and deliver oral presentations in English in their future allocated faculties. However, most of the assessment in the FYP in many universities in Saudi Arabia is mainly focusing on the students' receptive skills, such as listening, vocabulary and grammar while writing and speaking skills are neglected and given less attention. Although it is very easy to mark MCQs, more focus should be allocated to the productive skills, which are writing and speaking. Thus, this study argues that current assessment practices used in the FYP do not suit nor address the students' needs as they are being taught productive skills, while only assessing their receptive skills. This is in line with Brown's (1995, p.51) statement that "teachers may want to avoid using multiple-choice format, which is basically receptive (students read and select, but they produce nothing), for testing productive skills like writing and speaking". In addition, there is always a chance of luck in MCQs. The student could have no clue about the situation or question and still has a 25% chance of getting the correct answer. Miller and Legg (1993) strongly argue that current standardised achievement measures suffer from a narrow scope in addition to a negative impact on instruction. They continue stating that using MCQs would reduce classroom learning to rote memorisation of a narrow range of content and skills. In the same vein, Oller (1979) claims that MCQs are intrinsically in opposition to the interests of instruction. He dismisses their reliability and ease of administration arguing that they provide minimal benefits compared to the detrimental effects to instruction.

Of course, this study does not advocate the banishing of multiple-choice questions as it acknowledges that there are advantages to using them such as: quick grading, high reliability, objective grading and wide coverage of content (Samad, 2004). However, it suggests and advocates for the inclusion of other types of

questions in the ELI summative assessment that examine and evaluate the students' productive skills as well their receptive ones.

### **6.3.2 Grade Inflation**

Teachers suggested that one of the challenges they face in assessment is that the institution is more interested in giving students good marks rather than those that reflect their actual levels. This is known in the literature as *grade inflation* that Hall (2012) describes as the decrease or status quo of knowledge while grade point averages grow larger. It has been going on and escalating since the 1960s (Schroeder, 2016).

One way of doing this in the ELI is through giving marks for attendance. For example, attendance is considered part of the marking system, which might encourage students to attend more classes; however, simply attending and not participating will not benefit the learning process in the institution. This is consistent with the argument of Bates and Waldrup (2010) that teachers do not always have an absolute right to assign grades as sometimes university administrators might change the grades if students make an appeal. They add that as the administrators do not have the power to force teachers to change the grades as a professional courtesy, but the administration can change the grade if they choose to do so. Students' grades should be a clear indicator of academic achievement (Pattison, Grodsky, & Muller, 2013), but when the grades are inflated, there is a tendency to question the substance of the grades. Crumbley, Flinn, and Reichelt (2012) describe grade inflation in tertiary level education as "Deadly Symbiosis" (p. 308).

Another way of inflating students' grades is by making exams too easy. Most of the teachers interviewed believe that exams and assessment in the institution is very easy and accused the institution of wanting students to pass so they would look good. Teachers criticised the fact that students would pass and get good marks in their exams that actually do not represent their level. This is of paramount importance as it means that teachers do not believe in the validity of the tests in the institution. I am worried that the ELI wants to prove to the university that there are improvements in the students' learning thus justifying showering students with grades. It should be noted that grade inflation has a negative effect not only at the

level of the language institution, but also on a wider range affecting the course work in the university. Crumbley, Flinn, and Reichelt, (2012) clarify that grade inflation corresponds to course work deflation, meaning that homework and coursework have no value as it is just easier to give students grades instead. This has an effect on the whole university system, where the overall level of competence is actually weaker than the test results show. There will be a cumulative effect of this unreliable testing system as students will continue to be weak and will not be able to cope with higher levels of education. At an international level, Saudi students will find it difficult to cope with rigorous academic standards, which is a serious issue that needs to be acknowledged by the policymakers in Saudi universities in order to start taking protective measures to prevent this phenomenon from progressing.

## **6.4 Summary**

This chapter addressed the study's research questions, and the findings of the study were discussed in light of their context and existing literature. It concludes with the argument that it might be unrealistic for every teacher to be fully-involved in assessment, especially in larger institutions where standardisation represents fairness and efficiency, but it is important to recognise that teachers' opinions count and their contribution is important.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This chapter provides conclusions along with some key contributions to knowledge in the area of English language assessment. The chapter also assesses the implications of, and provides recommendations for teachers' roles and beliefs in the area of English language assessment in Saudi Arabia. This study revealed that teachers still consider summative assessment to be dominating language assessment policy in their institution. Teachers also complained about having a very limited role in the assessment practices in the ELI.

This research focused on studying how language tests are prepared and on the role of teachers within the assessment process by means of collecting qualitative data from interviews with teachers. The majority of teachers who took part in the research showed strong feelings towards the desire to be included in the assessment practices. They also wanted to become assessment literate and professionally developed by taking part in assessment workshops and training. It should be noted that given the limitations of this study, the findings of this investigation are exclusive to the current context. However, due to the procedures and methodology employed in this research, there is an element of external transferability of the results to similar settings within the context of higher education in Saudi Arabia. This is, however, an aspect that is more likely to be recognised by a reader who is familiar with higher education in the Saudi context. Implications of the findings will be presented in this chapter as well as suggestions for further research regarding teachers' roles in assessment. The impact of the study will be discussed briefly and finally, I will reflect on my doctoral journey as a whole and on what I have gained from it as a researcher and as a person.

### 7.1 Contributions to Knowledge

The findings of this study contribute to the field of language assessment in a number of ways. It has contributed to the understanding of the teachers' roles in assessment in a tertiary level in the Saudi context and to the area of pedagogy in broad sense.

### **7.1.1 Contribution to the Saudi Context**

The study contributes to the field of language assessment in that the findings of the research provide significantly valuable insights into the area of teachers' roles and beliefs regarding language assessment in the FYP at a Saudi language institution. As mentioned earlier in chapter one, few qualitative studies have addressed teachers' roles in assessment in Saudi Arabia as most studies that have been conducted employed the scientific methods. Conducting a qualitative study in the area of language assessment, might lead to changing the dominance of positivist views in language assessment, thereby expanding the research area in the Saudi context. Hence, it is hoped that that this study can be a sound example of qualitative research in this context and hopefully encourage other researchers to take on research projects along similar philosophical and methodological lines. Previous research studies, as reviewing the literature has revealed, investigated teachers' roles in assessment in only one language skill, namely, speaking or writing. Yet, none of the studies, to the best of my knowledge have attempted to uncover teachers' understandings of and attitudes towards assessment and their role in it.

### **7.1.2 Pedagogical Contribution**

The current study made a substantial contribution in the area of pedagogy in two different ways. First, the study shed light on some of the challenges that teachers experienced in continuous assessment of the language abilities of FYP students. For example, teachers were not allowed to either choose the date or the material for their continuous assessment practices in the EFL classroom since all aspects are controlled by the Assessment Committee who sometimes failed to take into consideration different abilities of different classes. Furthermore, the study emphasises that the development of useful and practical assessment guidelines that enable teachers to make the right pedagogical decisions surrounding the appropriate assessment type/ level to use in the classroom is desperately needed.

The second pedagogical contribution relates to the concept of assessment literacy. Indeed, the study supports that training teachers in language assessment offers important advantages to the institution. In addition to what has been discussed in



the literature, this study advocates raising the assessment literacy of teachers, which will help raise their job satisfaction, thereby making them better teachers in the classroom. This is because teachers with a high level of competence in assessment can perform better in the classroom and aid their colleagues who are less competent in assessment.

## **7.2 Implications of the Study**

This study has several implications for various areas and stakeholders including teachers, policy makers, testing committees, Professional Development, student motivation, and assessment literacy in the ELI. These will be discussed below.

### **7.2.1 Implications for Teachers**

The major concern lies in the fact that the assessment or testing policies in the ELI are exclusive in the sense that they do not involve teachers in these processes. Teachers are major stakeholders and excluding them from the assessment process, would threaten the validity and transparency that it aims to achieve. Teachers are stakeholders who are directly associated with the students; they know their students and their levels better because they actually deal with them on a day-to-day basis. As stated by Alnahdi (2014), teachers are the backbone of the educational process and when they have the responsibility along with proper training, this facilitates the educational process to move flawlessly and without any obstacle. If they are excluded from the assessment and test designing activities, the objective of assessing their students will not be achieved due to the lack of validity, reliability, usefulness and practicality. Furthermore, the impact of their non-involvement in the assessment process is that they may not be able to answer the students' questions properly about the assessment and the tests. Thus, the implication of this finding is that the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia should value and highlight teachers' role in assessment, which could be achieved by involving them in all aspects of assessment development. I am arguing here that involving teachers and giving them an actual valued role in assessment will not only help the teachers' self-esteem and confidence, but also will make them feel valued as contributors in the assessment process, which will in turn affect the quality of assessment produced in language institutions. I am confident that

assessment literate teachers can positively contribute to the development of assessment by addressing their students' needs accurately and at the same time providing suggestions on how to better develop the curriculum, as well as employing more continuous assessment in the classroom. This involvement can help in making assessment and the curriculum aligned together to better serve the language course objectives.

From the findings of this research, it can be seen that there are different views on the role of ELI teachers in language assessment practices. Most notably, it appears that it is not practical to completely exclude the teachers from the assessment process. Currently, teachers do not play an active role in summative assessment and the argument of whether the inclusion of the teacher in the assessment process can help maintain the standard and quality of assessment and ensure the safekeeping and security of tests is a crucial one. Certain policymakers may be against the inclusion of teachers in the process as they believe quality cannot be maintained if all teachers are involved given that the materials provided by the teachers are sometimes of very poor quality because they are copied from somewhere else and not produced by the teachers themselves. Moreover, it is also the opinion of some of the experts that if teachers are involved, the test is more likely to be leaked. However, the counter argument is that if teachers are not given opportunities to participate, it is more likely that their ability to develop and become assessment literate will be hindered. Thus, it is important, in my view, that teachers are given a chance to be involved in the assessment process as this is more likely to help them become assessment literate, thereby allowing them to deliver quality assessment material if given proper training and consistent professional development as discussed above. Overall, this finding suggests that the non-involvement of teachers in assessment and tests production can make teachers demotivated, as they feel powerless. As a result, their perception about their value in the institution changes thereby resulting in the loss of job satisfaction (Collie, Shapka & Perry, 2012).

### **7.2.2 Implications for the Assessment Committee**

Participants in this study voiced their understanding of and attitudes towards their role in language assessment. Teachers were mostly critical of the various elements of language assessment in which they were involved. The implication of this is that several areas need further investigation. First of all, the process of selecting teachers for the Assessment Committee needs to be re-examined and clear criteria introduced and adapted in terms of the selection of its members. Second, further investigation is needed regarding how assessment affects the teachers' approaches and methodology in the classroom and the policy adjusted. Finally, feedback that students receive about their assessment is quite limited, hence, the need to revise the process of feedback on written and oral assessments in the institution in order to maximise assessment for learning. This can ensure healthy feedback processes that are compatible with current students' needs. Therefore, policy makers need to be aware of the importance of feedback in the students' overall learning process.

### **7.2.3 Implications for Professional Development**

Addressing teachers' assessment literacy is an essential component for effective formative and summative assessment. Having regular PD programmes that include assessment is important and the institution needs to ensure the quality of these programmes by hiring experts in the field. I believe that more focus should be given to practical issues in assessment and afterwards there should be a strong monitoring process and accountability system for the teachers. Introducing new trends in language assessment, whether formative or summative, will definitely help in the inclusion of teachers in the assessment process and at the same time help implement what is learned in everyday classroom formative assessment practices. However, in the ELI, PD programmes are short and brief (one or two days) and it could be argued that organising PD programmes for slightly longer periods (2 to 3 weeks) can be more beneficial. Professional Development programmes should not end with teachers simply attending those programmes, but it is strongly suggested that after they complete the courses at the institution, there should be a monitoring system that ensures that those programmes are

implemented and used by the teachers in formative, continuous, and summative assessment and are continuously revised.

#### **7.2.4 Implications for Assessment Literacy**

One of the findings of this research is that in order to improve formative and continuous classroom-based assessment, teachers should have regular access to PD opportunities that enable them to learn how to design assessments that can enhance students' achievement. Although certain assessment programmes have been organised in the institution, simply exposing the teachers to assessment theories and other successful assessment innovations is not enough. The implication of this is that condensed one-day assessment workshops for example, are not the panacea. On the other hand, long-term collaborative training and support would greatly help in raising the assessment literacy of teachers. Getting feedback from colleagues and programme organisers in addition to university faculty, who are experienced in assessment, will result in long-term productive assessment changes. Such programmes should definitely recognise that assessment is not a concept that can be taught and addressed in isolation of other aspects of teaching and learning since it is heavily integrated with curriculum and instruction. This integration and strong relationship among those aspects will help in giving assessment a clear purpose in addition to enabling teachers to recognise their role in assessment, thereby giving them confidence in their own assessment practices in the classroom.

#### **7.2.5 Implication for Students' Motivation**

From the findings, it can be clearly seen that there is a strong relationship between students' motivation for learning and the tests in the institution and the issue of negative washback in the classroom. Findings indicated that teachers were complaining that preparing the students for the test is taking up a lot of the classroom time. However, it is well-known that students in the ELI, and students in Saudi Arabia in general, study and work for the tests and their final grades. According to the teachers, students are less concerned about whether they can really attain the required proficiency in the language. Modifying the amount of summative assessment in the ELI should help combat this grade-driven culture

and refocus students' efforts on learning rather than getting grades, which could increase their motivation. Giving teachers access to completed tests will aid the learning experience through constructive feedback, as argued earlier, thus affecting students' motivation levels. Teachers with no knowledge about the test could not share their knowledge with the students. Büyükkarcı (2014) argues that the students must be aware of their learning objectives and states that success criteria need to be presented in a clear and unambiguous way. Teachers do not need special skills for invigilation; in fact, in the ELI sometimes invigilators are not even teachers but administrative staff, which could make teachers feel that their knowledge and skills are not being valued or considered. Moreover, the skilled and creative teachers usually like to experiment new ideas in the classroom; however, if they work in a restricted pattern designed by the assessment committee, they might not get a chance to employ their creativity in the linguistic development of the students and/or their learning motivation.

### **7.3 Recommendations and Further Research**

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, the following issues can be recommended for future research:

Based on the current study, it seems that there is a need for research that deals with teachers' beliefs and practices not only in assessment in general, but also in specific language skills in different assessment contexts. This study was conducted in a context that included a small group of teachers in one university in Saudi Arabia. It seems fair to anticipate that studies in different Gulf Countries might produce valuable results that will expand our understanding of teachers' beliefs and practices in language assessment, thereby giving us a more comprehensive view of teachers' roles in language assessment at university level.

This study only included teachers in the investigation and it seems that it would be more productive to consider including other stakeholders, such as policymakers. Many of the teachers' concerns invoked the students' low motivation and limited language ability; however, such aspects are dynamic in nature and might change

in the future. Therefore, future research investigating teachers' and students' attitudes towards assessment could prove to be enlightening.

This study only included a limited number of teachers (20) to illicit views and beliefs; however, I feel that a quantitative approach aiming to include all the teachers in the institution would give us an overview of the number of teachers wanting to have an active role in assessment as well as shedding some light on the difficulties and obstacles that limit their involvement.

The institution needs to seek feedback from the students and regular Needs Analysis should be carried out as part of the assessment process. This will enable the institution and policymakers to reveal all of the difficulties students and teachers face in the current assessment system. When the teachers' voices are heard and respected, feelings of low self-concept will be eliminated as they recognise that they have an active role in the assessment process, while students' voices could help their motivation and enhance their learning experience.

Grade inflation in language institutions seems to be a phenomenon in Saudi universities that has not been studied or explored enough in the literature. It is a serious issue that needs further attention due to its detrimental effects on students' learning. A more in-depth study focusing on this phenomenon is needed to help provide a wider picture of assessment in the Saudi context and the Gulf Region in general.

Finally, there was no intention to intervene in the context of the research although this might take place in the future, in which case this study would be considered as the first phase of an overall action research plan. A second phase, however, would more likely to include an intervention from the researcher in order to improve any contextual problematic factors with regards assessment in the ELI.

## **7.4 Impact of the Study**

Teachers who were interviewed in the course of this research voiced their opinions regarding language assessment, and most of them wanted me to present the findings of my study to the ELI administration as a way to get their voices heard by the institution and policymakers in the university. I feel that this in itself is an important impact that my study will have once I return to work and present my research in the ELI.

## **7.5 Reflections on My Doctoral Research Journey**

I believe that by undertaking this research here in the United Kingdom this has contributed greatly to my academic development in various ways. In regard to my research skills, I now feel that I can conduct interviews efficiently and professionally as well as making sense of large amounts of qualitative data. This will definitely increase my self-confidence to conduct future qualitative research in the field of assessment. I have also learned how to review and critique the literature as well as to write academically and at the same time include my voice and arguments. Being at Exeter University gave me access to a wide variety of academic journals and books all of which helped my capability to read in depth. I feel that by conducting this research, it not only provided me with a great opportunity to explore the issue of teachers' roles in language assessment in the FYP at a Saudi University, but I also feel that my theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of EFL has been greatly enriched. This doctoral journey was indeed a challenging, yet personally rewarding experience. I found out that trying to address and understand the role the teachers play in assessment proved not as easy as I had expected.

Prior to starting this study, I believed that all ELI teachers should be involved in assessment in one way or another as I felt that it was not fair that only a selected few in the institution could influence the tests and assessment practices. However, after conducting this research and being increasingly aware of good practice in assessment and following an extensive exposure to the relevant literature, I now

feel that assessment is an issue that needs to be addressed by specifically trained individuals or a group of skilled teachers within the institution, such as those on the Assessment Committee. The image of the institution where each and every teacher can and will participate in all phases of assessment might in reality be unpractical, unrealistic and unfeasible. However, I still believe that every teacher in the institution should have the opportunity to participate or join the Assessment Committee if they feel qualified and confident enough to do so. This is only possible by having transparent, publicly-shared criteria for joining the Assessment Committee and all other committees in the institution as it is an important issue that I will try my best to argue for in language institutions in Saudi Arabia.



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# Appendices

## A Sample interview with coding. Interview 02

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**Researcher:** Hello Raj, my study will investigate the teachers' role and beliefs in assessment in the English Language Institution at [REDACTED].  
The two research questions are:

1. What is the role of the ELI teachers in the language assessment practices available in the institution?
2. What are the teachers' philosophies concerning language assessment?

I would like to start by asking you did you learn any foreign languages?

**Raj:** Yes, I do speak French fluently. I also studied German, but you know my German is not good at all- it's beginner level.

**Researcher:** Tell me about your experience in learning this language, please.

**Raj:** I started my career in 1997 as an English language teacher and then it continues until now. So around 15 years. While this is my sixth year in the ELI; in the Saudi context. I think I'm quite familiar here with the system of assessment. And the evolutionally process assessment has undergone here in the ELI. Yes, I'm quite familiar with that with regards to the languages I learned other than English. I did a little bit of Persian for only six months and I also learned Arabic for two months.

**Researcher:** What kind of assessment do you remember as a student?

**Raj:** Well in Persian, it was kind of a continuous language assessment and then we had an achievement test at the end. It was also the same in Arabic, no but in Arabic it was only an achievement test. We had classroom participation and the

teacher would come and give a lecture and discuss vocabulary items. Then he would give us some time to practice. And then towards the end of the second month there was a final test. So, it was mainly an achievement test for Arabic.

I went to learn the Persian language and the aim was to learn for the sake of Persian literature. Somehow, the language teacher and I we were at cross-purposes. He was teaching Persian language for people who would go to Iran and Afghanistan and engage in some kind of trade or cultural activities. For me, I had no intention in going to those countries. I was learning for the sake of Persian poetry. It's quite musical and I like it. So that was one conflict there. When he went into clock wheel structures, I did not like that. I wanted to remain- you see- in their literary structures and the language of literature. But overall, that was a good experience.

**Researcher:** Do you think that any of those experiences affected your current assessment practices?

**Raj:** I think that in Persian and Arabic, I really don't consider them very strong learning experiences. However, my experience of learning the English language has been monumental in my life. A very strong experience. I have been through many phases, I had a large number of teachers, good ones and bad ones. I had this experience of learning English from so many teachers. But when I look back they were only two teachers who were really good teachers. I feel indebted to those two or three of them. Although I learned English from more than 20 teachers, more than 20 language teachers- English language teachers, I only look up to just two or three of them and they were in the UK. I really feel in debt to those three teachers. And these teachers were competent, not only competent in English language they were also competent in the profession. They knew how to teach. They used continuous assessment and I consider continuous assessment the best form of assessment to use **(Continuous Assessment & Teacher and Assessor as one, under ELI Policy → Teachers Beliefs).**

(00:05:05)

I consider it the best because you get immediate feedback, which is really quite encouraging (**Feedback under continuous Assessment**). Again, when we get admission to a course and start learning something new and we want to get some sort of certification, so the achievement tests are always there. We have to go through them ... they are always there (**Necessity of Summative Assessment**).

**Researcher:** I want to know what are the current ELI Assessment practices that the teachers are involved in? I would like you to think about the last semester. I want to know about any classes or sessions that included some sort of assessment and I will ask you some specific questions about your role in those practices. I want to know how teachers think about assessment. What do you do when you start planning the assessment procedures? Could you please walk me through your thinking process as best as you can?

**Raj:** There are many forms of assessment. There is continuous assessment. Then here at ELI there are placement tests, which is the first form of assessment that happens here. Placement tests are usually centrally-controlled, but sometimes they are a bit easy and students float through them and they get into a wrong level. It happens occasionally. It is not a frequent practice. But they somehow flow through the system and they get into the wrong level. (**Unreliable Placement Tests under Challenges**). The teacher has to place them. So the teacher can recommend such kind of student to ... I mean they should be sometimes moved downwards, in other cases up a level. And that how we get around the problem in placement tests, this happens usually after the first week of each level of each module (**Unreliable Placement Tests under Challenges**). And after that of course, comes the continuous assessment. We have classroom tests we have module exams. We have assessments for writing skills-- continuous assessment I mean. When it comes to speaking, we have mid-module assessments. And there are kind of an achievement test. We also have portfolios: vocabulary, reading, writing. But currently they have curtailed the number of activities in the portfolio and now the portfolios have been reduced to writing portfolio.

**Researcher:** You've been teaching before and after this change. What do you prefer?

**Raj:** I'm not happy with them. I used to develop my own kind of continuous assessment with my students. I would give them a lot of handouts, worksheets, relevant worksheets to the course content and I would ask them to bring a folder with at least 50 to 60 pockets (Design under continuous Assessment). And one small section was set aside for the regular work required by the ELI assessment procedures (Top-Down Eli policy Under Teachers Beliefs). And the remaining sections was for a lot of stuff that I would give them in the classroom. This was a different kind of portfolio that I created just for them. That was for my satisfaction and for the students learning. It had a different end. But the ELI assessment was just a small section in that portfolio. I remember two modules back we had an extensive change, this was close to the accreditation thing that was happening to the ELI. We were left with just a very small portfolio concerned with writing. The accreditation has made us to be more practical and more rationalistic. Because we used to have a lot of number of assessments... There was so much happening here and unfortunately most of that assessment was unreliable or too easy, and unauthentic (Tests Are Too Easy under Challenges).

(00:10:00)

You see, there was minimal benefit to students' achievement. There was so much assessment there was so much happening here. Unfortunately, most of the people at the top -who were taking care of writing- specially the portfolio, they were not skilled (Teacher Qualifications under ELI Policy→ Teachers Beliefs). In addition to that- something, that is really interesting- I usually share this with my colleagues because I am an IELTS's examiner as well. I showed one script to my colleagues and I told them, if I grade this script according to international standards- University of Cambridge standards- I will give this student 9/10. However, if I use the ELI rubrics, this student will only get 5/10. You see the problem. Because they have pitched their test very high. The intermediate level student on Common European Framework, on B1 scale is an intermediate student. And we usually assess the writing of an intermediate student, on the scale of an advanced or proficient student. They wouldn't measure up, that is the problem. Because these things have been pointed out to them, but you know this has been happening here for years. And this is still happening. For most of the teachers,

assessment is a very complicated area and the teachers here need very specific training in that area (**Teacher Qualifications under ELI Policy → Teachers Beliefs**). You see the test can only be reliable if two examiners evaluate one script and there isn't any major discrepancy in the scoring. If I evaluate the script and I give the student 7/10, another teacher evaluates the same script, and he is giving 9/10, this means that this test is not reliable. However, the problem is not there, the problem is understanding the rubric given to us. Because it was not properly prepared (**The Rubrics under ELI Policy → Teachers Beliefs**). I learnt a lot from the IELTS exam training because their rubric is based on 30 years of research. And there is extensive work done in that area and they train the teachers. Therefore, if two examiners are given one script, there should be no major discrepancies between them as they are assessing the same script, there isn't any major discrepancies between them. I mean not more than one or two points maybe. But if [the difference] there is more than two points then there is a problem.

But here such kind of training is lacking. Even when they offered such training, the trainer himself was not really qualified (**Professional Development and Testing under Teachers Beliefs**). And people [trainers] concede themselves as the masters of assessment. While the fact is they have very little knowledge on assessment. This is really unfortunate to be happening in our ELI (**Teacher Qualifications under ELI Policy → Teachers Beliefs**). However, some of those have left now, especially one of them. Somehow, this guy was able to trick the authorities here into making them believe that he was the man for assessment, like I'm the guy who knows all these things and so on. He prepared the rubrics. People who come here, they come from different countries with different backgrounds. The faculty comprises around 200 teachers from more than 25 countries. Especially people coming from Asia, they come here for a long stay. Five years, 10 years, sometimes 20 years. While people coming from the west they usually come here for two or three years and it's very rare that people will stay here for more. So then, they don't want to make waves in order to ensure that their stay will not be interrupted; that is the attitude here (**Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs**). Most of the people here have a kind of laid-back attitude. They say okay let the



system go wherever it goes. We will just go with the flow; we will not be the people making trouble **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs)**.

Because if you criticise, it's human nature that we are narcissistic. Whenever somebody who is competent is questioned, people become very defensive. Not only in this context, they not only become defensive, but if they wheel some power and use value, they can become antagonistic and you would be in trouble **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs)**.

Because you know the Deans have some sort of administrative responsibilities, they don't look into the details-the specifics. Now for the first time I think they have a really competent guy called [REDACTED] he has a Ph.D. from a well-known university. And he's really working hard to fix the system. There were lots of hedges, you see, there were very strong long tentacles. They have been quite influential and in key positions at the top and things like that. But things are changing. There is a big improvement in the assessment during the past six months

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I have this feeling that things are going [to get better] . . . , I've been teaching for the last three or four months, I have taught here close to 5 years. I've been working in the research unit so I am a little bit out of touch, but I still know what's happening here.

**Researcher:** Are there any specific decisions you have to make (date, timing etc.). Do you have any freedom when you implement your assessment practices? (Or are they given to you, and you just have to implement them). Do you decide how often and when to implement continuous assessment practices?

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**Raj:** This is again another grey area in the ELI. Unfortunately, teachers have no autonomy when it comes to continuous assessment. Crudely speaking, teachers have no autonomy **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs)**. Everything is centrally-controlled. The ELI has a highly regimented system. I mean they have given some flexibility, but is still very tightly controlled **(Top-Down Policy under**

**Teachers Beliefs).** In addition to that, we have a pacing guide. Therefore, the assessment dates are already decided and fixed by the administration and the teacher has to follow them **(Administration of the Test Only under continuous Assessment).** I think one of the reasons for being so top-down in these things are because this is a very big setup. This is probably the biggest language Institute in the kingdom catering for around 6,000 to 8,000 students. I think that too much of autonomy is not possible here **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs).** Or if they introduce some kind of structure changes in the system and they mix small groups of teachers. Only then it is possible to have some autonomy. If teachers who are really competent and they are autonomous, believe me, they can produce a lot. They can really be productive. They can produce good results. But the bottom line is that teachers have little autonomy. They have to flow with the system **(Administration of the Test under continuous Assessment).**

**Researcher:** You somehow answered my next question, which is do you have any freedom when implementing continuous assessment practices?

**Raj:** No we don't. We have to follow the instructions. And we have to follow them in blindly. And there is little flexibility; you see sometimes you don't want to do something **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs).** You have this feeling that whatever I'm doing in the class is not suitable for my students. Whatever I'm doing in the class is not suitable for the students, but I have to do it. If I decide that I need to delay the test for next week, for example, I can't. If I want to give them another test, I also can't **(Administration of the Test Only under continuous Assessment).**

Sometimes, I have other ways to compensate for these issues, these drawbacks, these weaknesses in the system. Because the teacher is also a mediator between this system and the students. He has a very huge responsibility; because the teacher is answerable to the administration on one side, but he is also beholden to the student. Because there is a kind of relationship between the teacher and students and if you don't deliver! Or if students at the end of the module have this feeling that they didn't achieve anything. **(Students Future under Stakeholders**

**Needs → Teachers Beliefs)** this is really bad for the teacher in turn for his job prospects in terms of his own character, his own self.

For example, when I look at my students faces and see that they don't have any sense of achievement, so I have made a system for myself and I have prepared this earlier. I have a lot of worksheets that I give them. I also get their emails in order to keep in touch with them after the classes finished (**continuous Assessment under Teachers Roles**). I try to give them a lot of background material. You see, at least this is for the good students, the ones that want to learn. Because for the teacher and students a sense of achievement is really important in order to sustain their motivation and learning. If they don't have any sense of achievement, then they will just lose their motivation (**Students Motivation under Teachers Challenges**).

**Researcher:** If we look at the last semester that you thought, how would you describe the teachers' attitudes and feelings regarding the assessment practices?

**Raj:** In general, teachers really feel bad about these things. And when teachers talk to each other on a personal level, they complain a lot and there is a lot of grumbling, but they do not pass these things to the higher administration. Because they just want to go with the flow and they do not want to cause any trouble (**Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs**). I remember that I used to convey these things but . . . [silence].

**Researcher:** It caused you problems?

**Raj:** Yes. I just don't any more (**Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs**).

I used to complain about these things; I used to talk with my coordinator. I raised a number of questions and discussed these issues because I really wanted results and I also wanted the system to run smoothly. It should deliver something. So, I knew these things. I have been trained as a language teacher to notice these things. The theory and practice I pointed out that our rubrics are not properly prepared. They are very highly pitched. I sort of anticipated that the rubrics will not work out and this is what happened. However, they are working on them, they are changing them, but it is still in process. Because now they have an assessment

unit and people are working there (**Teachers Qualifications under ELI Policy →Teachers Beliefs**).

You see, we had people in the assessment unit who had masters in English Literature, people with Masters in Education only. Some with BAs in mathematics. Some with only CELTA while others with BA in Computer Science even! TESOL certificates. That is another problem- that teachers are not properly qualified to deal with assessment (**Teachers Qualifications under ELI Policy →Teachers Beliefs**).

**Researcher:** Do you provide your students with feedback on their continuous assessments? Why do you do that/ Why don't you do that?

**Raj:** I believe that the ELI have developed a very good system with regards to feedback. We have to give them [students] feedback in writing now. And orally as well. We follow IELTS rubrics or IELTS codes for highlighting students' mistakes. Like if there is a structural error, we write SS. Or spelling we write SP. If there is a word that is redundant, we write NN. We point out these things on the first draft that the students write. And then students write the second draft. We also give subjective feedback like: "you should work on these areas" for example, "your structure, your grammar, your spelling is poor" (**Feedback Under Continuous Assessment**). Sometimes we tell them you need to improve your vocabulary. Also on paragraphing and other stylistic features. And then the students write the second draft. And there is usually a quite good improvement because they write it again and fix the mistakes that have been pointed out to them (**Design under continuous Assessment**).

**Researcher:** What are your thoughts regarding only marking the second draft?

**Raj:** The problem with writing is that the students have really very bad writing skills. And I somehow feel that -and I have discussed this issue with a number of students- this is not a problem in English only for them, but it is also a problem in Arabic [their mother tongue]. They [students] say "we are not good writers of Arabic in the first place". This is actually true. When we assess students, we have to take into account the students first language proficiency. It happens that a student who

is not doing well in his second language may not be very good in his mother tongue in different skills of his first language. And I believe that this is one of the reasons that they have poor writing skills in English.

I believe that there should be an independent, very well designed customised writing programme for our students. It should not be just thought as one skill in a general English programme. This should be a kind of separate English writing skill specially designed for them. Initially, we have started giving them out of 18 hours, I think 2 to 3 hours of writing in a week. I think before that we used to give them just one hour. Now they have increased the number of hours allocated to writing- three hours now. But I believe that this is still not enough. And the writing has to be given more attention.

**Researcher:** Back to my main question: out of what we have now, what are your thoughts regarding only marking the second draft?

**Raj:** I believe that if we assess the first draft, we will be representing the actual level of the students. The first draft represents the actual level of the students. We mark the second draft, which is not the true level or the true assessment for our students. We do this to give them good grades; we are actually helping their disability.

Another factor, which is very important in the Saudi context, you see, it's a grade-driven culture, students are more interested in the grades than actual learning. Primarily, it's a grade driven culture, they are too much into getting good grades without learning the language skills. It's all about how to pass the test (**Student Motivation under Challenges**). You see in the first module, we usually get very good students, a number of them when I ask them about their future, aims or ambitions 90% of them want to be doctors. It is a really strange percentage like out of 25 we would have 20 or 22 want to be doctors and one or two want to be engineers. So, for the first two modules we have really ambitious students who aim very high and then we move into the second half of the year. Then, we are left with students who would either go to Islamic Studies, Business School, Law, Humanities. These students have little motivation to learn the English language and it becomes very hard for the teacher (**Student Motivation under**

**Challenges).** I can see that over the years, I see a kind of gradual improvement. I don't see any decline. The positive thing is that there is improvement in the system. In my first year here, I had very poor students, then a year after, things have improved and now when we discuss with my colleagues, there is some improvement in the students. There is some kind of systemic change in the schools. So, there is maybe some kind of quality control procedures there. So, things are improving.

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**Researcher:** Do you give feedback after the mid-term exam or the final exam?

**Raj:** Well of course there's no chance to give any feedback after the final exam because the module is over and there are no more classes. And unfortunately after the mid-term exam there's really not a lot to give the students (**Feedback under Summative Assessment**). You see exams are now done in a computer lab; this means that each student has a different exam with a different set of questions. It's really unfortunate that teachers don't have any access to the students' answers, therefore no chance of them [teachers] giving them any constructive feedback.

**Researcher:** Please describe more to me how you give students feedback.

**Raj:** We use IELTS exam coding system for pointing out their mistakes in the writing text. We also write a descriptive small paragraph and sentences to highlight their weaknesses. And give them some kind of guidelines for future improvements. This is how we give them writing feedback (**Feedback under continuous Assessment**). And of course, when we do the speaking exam with them, the feedback is immediately after they finish their assessment. I explain to the student what he did wrong and ask the remaining class if they know the correct form; this will give the student a chance to understand his mistakes and hopefully not repeating them in the future (**Feedback under Summative Assessment**).

**Researcher:** How about reading?

**Raj:** Well, in reading there is not much feedback to give (**Feedback under continuous Assessment**). The students have some tasks to complete and if they

read the text at home and answer the questions in class, they get their full grades. However, unfortunately a lot of students lose marks because they are absent in the reading assessment classes.

**Researcher:** Is there any student self-evaluation? Or peer evaluation? If yes, please give me more details.

**Raj:** We also have peer editing, which was introduced last year. So we exchange students' scripts among them. There are also some personal things that I do as well; I give them some sample essays. For example, in one class if I have four or five students who have written a very well essay, I will make some photocopies and give it to the students. Of course, after getting their permission. And their copies will be modules among other students. And the best one or two essays, we ask the students to read them aloud in front of their colleagues. It is a motivation for them; it's like (we have accomplished something) in addition so again it's a kind of inspiration for the remaining students **(Student Motivation under Challenges)**. It's like one of their fellow students have good language skills, so they can also be like them. So this is how I usually go about things with regards to feedback. This is how the assessment practices affect the way I teach. I use them in my teaching. Yes, I usually give them sample essays; I also give them and prepare handouts. About descriptive writing, I have prepared a number of handouts on how to go about that. Descriptions of people, places. I also give them a lot of vocabulary. And how to make outlines and I discuss different things with them.

**Researcher:** Do you explain to your students how would you grade their tests? Do you give them the results and how?

**Raj:** Yes, we usually share the rubrics with the students. We share that information **(The Rubrics under ELI Policy – Teachers Beliefs)**

In fact, we are supposed to share, we are asked to share the rubrics with the students, and we explain to the students how we are going to mark their essays in all different language skills we assess them in **(The Rubrics under ELI Policy – Teachers Beliefs)**. To be frank, that is one of the problems you see as soon as they know how little they are going to get for class participation and continuous

assessment in the classroom, they are immediately uninterested (**Student Motivation under Challenges**). They start asking about the final exam and the mid module exam as they hold 60% of the mark. This in turn shifts the focus in the classroom to the midterm and final exams. And of course the regular question we always get at the end of the module: "Teacher is this going to be in the final exam?" (**Teaching for the Test under Summative Assessment**).

Another area of assessment with a lot of problems is the assessment of speaking; we have the same issues there. The rubric is not according to the students' level. Again, I once used a very harsh phrase for that I said, "This rubric is a fundamentally flawed document". This made my coordinator really angry with me. He said: "You shouldn't be so outspoken; you know it can be a problem for me". (**Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs**).

**Researcher:** But you always said that to him?

**Raj:** No, we were a team- a coordination team and we were discussing stuff. And he was encouraging the teachers to give the students good marks. And then I said, "At least, we have to develop their skills as well. That is our responsibility as teachers. I believe that we are too generous with grades. I am personally generous person. However, when I'm generous I have to be just as well. To be just generous in my assessment. I am on the positive side. I want to give them rewards for the redeeming features" (**Students Future under Stakeholders Needs → Teacher Beliefs**). They have used, for example, some good expressions. They have good handwriting. Their presentation is good sometimes. These are some of the plus points so I can give them some rewards for that. But again I have to justify. And the rubric unfortunately does not help with that (**Design under continuous Assessment**).

**Researcher:** Could you please tell me more about the speaking exam?

**Raj:** I feel that my students have very little practice and feedback before they give their marked presentation (**Feedback under continuous Assessment**). In addition, very few teachers here make personal efforts to develop the students' skills; this is quite unfortunate. It's better that students don't memorise their



presentations. Now it's really based on text. So we prepare some kind of relevant questions and we give them practice in those questions (**Design under continuous Assessment**).

Our students spend around one year learning language here in the institution. However, they don't gain a lot from this system. They should learn, they should gain something, they should feel after a year that they learnt something. Something not substantial, but again it varies from teacher to teacher. A good teacher there will definitely be a different level of learning. And if the teacher is unfortunately not very skilled, or not very efficient, students unfortunately suffer.

**Researcher:** Is the system still going on that a different teacher is used for different skills?

**Raj:** No, unfortunately, the same teacher teaches all four skills. So if the students are unlucky with an inefficient teacher.

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You see we have integrated language skill courses. I personally I am not in favour of this. I think we should have language-based courses; I mean skill based courses. I mean like we used to have before (**Students Future under Stakeholders Needs → Teachers Beliefs**). Two teachers are engaged in one class so if students are not happy with one teacher, at least they have another teacher for a kind of compensation. Now, it's the same teacher teaching, 18 hours a week. We have a scale of 1 to 5. So, teachers who are at the scale of five -I know many of them- because I know many of them being involved in their interviews of excellence of teachers. If students get a rank five teacher, they are very lucky. And if they get around to [lesser rank] teacher or a rank three teacher, that's unfortunate for them. But the good thing is that people who are working in different departments [are] either qualified people most of them I mean. And the old system is dying. And dying fast (**Teachers Qualifications under ELI Policy → Teachers Beliefs**). And the changes that have been introduced in last year and the year before, it will pay in the future.

**Researcher:** Do you see these changes affecting the teachers in any way?

**Raj:** Again, it varies from teacher to teacher. There are so many factors here. Assessment is only one area and it is a specialised field. There are problems, there are, but you see things are changing. The system is improving. Especially in the last 6 - 7 months. And there is big improvement in the system.

**Researcher:** Thank you. Now, I would like to ask you some questions about your beliefs concerning assessment and testing. From your point of view, why do you think we assess/ test our ELI students?

**Raj:** I think assessment should have at least two aims. One is to evaluate students, whether they have learnt something or not. But the second purpose is also with the help of assessment, we develop a system of teaching and learning. A system of instruction that can also be developed based on the feedback of the assessment system. But here [in the ELI] assessment is just focused on evaluating students' achievement (Design under Summative Assessment). The teacher's feedback is not considered. Or it is given little importance (Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs). Because there are teachers who have concerns and they convey those concerns to the authorities, but there are problems here. And if teachers' voice is heard, then the system will definitely improve (Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs). And that will help in improving the system of instruction. Currently, assessment is just aimed at students' achievement; have they learnt something or not. And there are flaws- there are a lot (Design under Summative Assessment). It's really difficult to focus on the curriculum and teaching them [the students]. The fact remains that when I teach, my students usually end up focusing on familiarising and practising with previous tests (Teaching for the Test under Summative Assessment).

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I will just recap. I personally feel that one aim of assessment is it measures students' achievement; the second important aim is that it should also help improve the system of learning and teaching (Design under Summative Assessment).

**Researcher:** How about for the students themselves. What do you feel we are preparing them for?

**Raj:** I believe that the objective of the whole of the ELI is to prepare them for their future studies in their concerned departments to a certain extent.

**Researcher:** How about current assessment practices and exams, do they give or show the actual level of the students?

**Raj:** No. There are problems. Students they are actually... I mean when they joined the ELI... They already have good language skills. I mean the good students they come with good language level and when they leave, they are much better. But the students who come here with poorer language skills. They leave . . . [silence]. I mean, they get a certificate, they pass. But in terms of language development, their achievements are not considerable **(Students Future under Teachers Beliefs).**

**Researcher:** Okay, you said they pass; however, does the grade reflect their actual level?

**Raj:** No. I mean the system is improved now, but a year ago, things were really bad. Students who pass it would just float through the system, at the end, they would get a certificate as an Intermediate Level student, but their actual level was still a Beginner **(Tests are too Easy under Challenges).** They would get a certificate of B1 or B2, but they were A1. That was happening and it is still happening, but the instance of that has reduced. We can still say, I mean maybe I'm not sure there are not any data available, 10 - 20% students who were at low level still pass through the system. But before, that was maybe 60 or 70% of them would just pass through the system. Now, as I told you the system has improved a lot.

**Researcher:** With this change, tell me about your role as a teacher in the assessment practices? Has it changed?

**Raj:** You see, as I told you before, I consider myself just a classroom teacher. My role is a mediator as well. I have to mediate between this system and the students. My role has remained the same. This role is that I follow the instructions and the procedures **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs)** and if there are, and definitely there are, weaknesses in the system I try to compensate them with some

other means. I prepare extra materials, supporting materials, and I try to support my students. I tried to find some freedom to do this. I always do this. Even when there is little freedom in the system, but somehow I would manage that. Because I have a commitment with the students (**Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs**). So, it is one of my personal beliefs that my students should leave the class every day with a sense of achievement. And towards the end of the module, when they look back they should have this feeling that this time they spent [with me in the classroom] was worthwhile. And the teacher was really good. Because when I look back, I find very few teachers were really good. So, my personal aim in teaching is that when my students think about me, they remember me in good words. So they should have a good opinion about me. So I try to be very genuine in my efforts. I try to work hard and honestly.

**Researcher:** That's great, what do you think of the current assessment procedures in the ELI? a. Are they sufficient? b. Do you think anything should be included or excluded?

**Raj:** You see; I have trust in the abilities of the people working in the assessment unit now (**Teachers Qualifications under Eli Policy → Teachers Beliefs**). Because they are lately genuinely qualified and they are committed people and they want to develop and improve the system. Although there are still one or two imposters there-- I know it's a harsh word. Because somehow they are able to twist the heart of the administrators that they have got the skills, but they actually don't have them (**Teachers Qualifications under Eli Policy → Teachers Beliefs**). And sometimes they themselves don't know that they don't have the skills because of lack of self-knowledge. You see, we live in this world of complacency, we are complicit about certain things. Oh I have got the skills! But they actually don't have it. So, but there are some really qualified teachers in the Assessment Unit; I hope we are going to get a very good assessment system in the coming months or at least within the next year.

**Raj:** Um, can you repeat the question please?

**Researcher:** Yes, I was trying to know. With regards to summative assessment and continuous assessment, what would you change in the current practices? I

want to know your thoughts about what is happening now and how would you change it?

**Raj:** You see, we have a seven-week module and we have mid-module exam. I would definitely do something to do away with the mid-module exams. And we should have a strong continuous assessment in place of their achievement test bad module after three weeks (**Design under continuous Assessment**).

**Researcher:** What do you mean when you say “Continuous Assessment”?

**Raj:** Yes, I mean formative assessment that is marked. That is happening on a daily basis and it is not centrally-controlled, again it’s in the teacher’s hand. The 20 or 30 marks that are in the teacher’s hand (**Marking under continuous Assessment**). But the mid-module exam is also not doing good for this institution (**Design under Summative Assessment**). It is a kind of hindrance. Because we start teaching in week one, of course there are very few students in the first week. When we are in the flow, we move into the third week and then there is a mid-module exam. Again then there is a break. This really wastes a lot of time. (**Time Constraints under Challenges**).

**Researcher:** So, you think it’s better that the teaching is not interrupted for the whole seven weeks?

**Raj:** Yes, seven weeks of continuous teaching and then we have the final exam. Just one exam. During all these weeks, we have continuous assessment, we have weekly writing assignments instead of one assignment in two weeks. So we should focus on those things (**Design under continuous Assessment**) and (**Curriculum Vs. Assessment under Teachers Beliefs**)

We should put some trust in the teachers (**Teacher and Assessor as one under ELI Policy → Teachers Beliefs**). And if we think that there are some teachers who are not fully qualified, we should provide for them some training. Yes, people can be trained (**PD and Testing under Teachers Beliefs**). Because if you hired somebody and you have evaluated him, you would think he is up to the mark. But in the classroom, he performs differently, then he can be trained (**PD and Testing under Teachers Beliefs**). We should have very focused training. Instead of giving

very general trainings, where we are taking care of seven or eight different aspects of language (PD and Testing under Teachers Beliefs). I mean, for example, we should just have one full crash training course for writing. And one full crash training course for speaking.

We should have very focused training, and then there should be follow-ups. The problem with the training system is that there is training and then after six months or a year, there is another training without any follow-up (PD and Testing under Teachers Beliefs). For example, if the teachers have been trained then they should have a second phase of training and the results of the first training course should be measured. That kind of mechanism should be there.

**Researcher:** Since the introduction of the new FYP Programme, have you attended any Professional Development programmes here? Did any of these programmes involve assessment?

**Raj:** Yes, there were. I remember that there were one or two trainings about general issues in English language teaching. However, there was a training session on assessment, but only people working in the Assessment Unit were invited. They were asked to attend that (PD and Testing under Teachers Beliefs).

**Researcher:** Could any other teacher join the programme if they wanted?

**Raj:** No, they couldn't. It's because it is very expensive I think. And it took place in the British Council. And it was offered to very few people. Now, these people can further train other teachers (PD and Testing under Teachers Beliefs). I think, as I told you there is a big change in the system, and last year and this year things are getting better and very fast. So, I hope by the end of this year we will have a strong assessment system.

**Researcher:** Tell me more about the amount of assessment that is going on. What about the number of tests?

**Raj:** I still believe we have the same number of tests. We have mid-module tests and final tests. Actually, there are some changes, I'm not really sure. For example,

this module because of the Hajj break, the mid-module test . . . Ah no there was a mid-module test. There is a mid-module test and a final test. Two writing tests and two speaking tests. They have probably reduced one speaking test. But I remember very well that last semester they had two writing [and] two speaking, one mid-module and one portfolio. There is too much of testing in the ELI. And I don't know why **(Time Constraints under Challenges)**. One reason, which I can understand, is that to give them [the students] more marks. You see, there is a considerable amount of trust deficient between the faculty and administration **(Marking under Summative Assessment & Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs)**. And I don't know how this can be bridged. That is really unfortunate. Because at the administration level, they have very low opinion of the teachers. And teachers somehow consider the administration are somehow [teacher hesitated] are the slave masters **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs)** are the hard task masters.

This is good and bad at the same time. An administrator should be an administrator. He should develop a good system and he has to win teachers' hearts as well. That is a strong system. A strong academic system. I believe if we had that, it would automatically flush out weak teachers. They won't be able to survive. Somehow, there are still loopholes in the system and the weak teachers can survive and all of them. Because there are 200 teachers; there are 40 or 50 teachers who are not properly qualified, but somehow they are still in the system. And because of those 20 or 25% of teachers, the 70 or 75% of good teachers suffer. Because they are all tarred with the same stick. They consider the -- I shouldn't use the word "bad teachers" -- they consider the weak teachers the less successful teachers. And then they prepare the rules and the rubrics. It's because they want to tighten them up. And who suffers? The good teacher suffers. The excellent teachers, the teachers who are committed to their profession, they suffer from the system. I have suffered in the system. I have always prepared my own portfolio. I prepare a lot of stuff for my students. And if students' satisfaction level is measured in my class, it would be the maximum. You see, we used to have one office hour a day, now they made it two hours. But you see there is no benefit for the students. You see that is a problem for the teachers. You spend two hours in

your office, you basically don't do anything. You keep chatting with other colleagues because no students show up. But if you go home you can do something.

So I think, when you become an administrator, you should consider the things that ... In a system, you should have a very tight strong system of education, administration management. But you should have a good rapport with the teachers. And if you have a good rapport with the coordinators because they are also part of the administration. Then there is trust deficit between the teachers and the administration.

It is very hard I know, I worked with Dr.\*\*\*\*\* and I chose to work with him because he is very nice and friendly; he puts some trust in us, he has given us full freedom. In the Research Unit, I mean. We are doing our best, and if we have a deadline, we will definitely meet the deadline. Because there is a man trusting in us. And this is human nature; if you trust somebody, it is rare that this person would shake your trust. If you expect something from somebody, he will live up to this expectation, if you have a strong relationship. And if the relationship is weak, people will find ways to trick [you]. You see, they will somehow. I mean there are ways to wiggle around or pass these things.

**Researcher:** Do you feel that teachers should concentrate on teaching only, and leave the tests/ test preparations to the “assessment people”?

**Raj:** You see again, there are a lot of things to be considered according to this context and culture.

I personally believe that teachers should have some kind of control or power. They have 20 - 25 marks in their hands, which they should award based on students' classroom performance, participation, behaviour-- all of that (Marking under continuous Assessment). Teachers have just 10 marks, which are allocated to the portfolio and again it is not fully in the hands of the teachers. Because if this student does the work, he will get them [full marks]. I think the teacher has only one or two marks that he could really control. Or at the most five points (Marking under continuous Assessment). Like there is a writing script that there are three



marks for that. And if the students deserve one out of three the teacher gives him three out of three. This is how actually in a portfolio assessment the student deserves five but the teacher gives him eight or nine. He actually shouldn't, but somehow in some ways they do that. They add Just two or three points. Like if the student deserves five, he could get eight if the teacher wanted to give him. And if there is a Saudi teacher, he might give 10 out of 10. No questions asked by any one. Even the unit coordinator won't ask him any questions because he is a Saudi **(Marking under continuous Assessment)**. And that happens quite often. Because when they [the Saudi teachers] teach in the class, they have a good rapport with the students and they are very generous—probably too generous **(Marking under continuous Assessment)**. And this is quite disrupting for the system. But again, not all of the Saudi teachers do that. I have witnessed one case where the coordinator called a Saudi teacher and told him “you have given the whole class 10 out of 10!”. And that is not possible. But he [the Saudi teacher] said “No my students deserve that”. And later on they found out that he didn't even prepare any portfolios. [Researcher and Raj laughing] **Raj:** he just gave them 10 out of 10. That happens. But again teachers should have something. But again that should be monitored-- should not be misused. But for the good teachers, it will be quite productive because they can motivate their students. Students are going to be more regular in the class. It will encourage classroom participation. So, anyhow continuous assessment is quite good. Just having one achievement test at the end of the term, you see maybe the student is sick on that day, or he has some kind of problem. Exam anxiety is also there. I think there should be some marks for continuous assessment in the hands of the teacher **(Marking under continuous Assessment)**, and then we have the final achievement test.

**Researcher:** Where do you stand, with regards to involving students in assessment practices?

**Raj:** I think you mean students autonomy and whether they can affect the materials in the test or not. You see, students have no autonomy here. That is not possible here because of the big setting here and large number of students **(Students Motivation under Teachers Beliefs)**. If they give that kind of autonomy, then every classroom would be different. And it is not possible in this system. In a small

English school that is possible. That's also why too much of teacher autonomy is not possible. But still they can have some flexibility, sometimes they have given that. A year ago, we used to have a very tight pacing guide. It was an hourly pacing guide. And now, we have a weekly pacing guide. Still, even weekly is still a lot, but it is better than hourly [Laughing] **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs)**.

(01:03:00)

You see, there are different kind of students, and there is one topic, you have to teach this topic in this very hour and in the next hour you have to teach another topic. Sometimes, you feel in the class that students need some kind of background, you have to teach them something else before you teach that. You have to teach something else after you teach that. You need to summon the knowledge. But you cannot do that! Because your hands are tied. I also once said to my colleague "teachers here; you have just tied our hands and you ask us to swim" **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs)**.

**Researcher:** What do you think about the current assessment procedures in the ELI? Do they help or hinder the objectives of the ELI?

**Raj:** There is no straight answer for this question because there are some assessment practices, which are really helpful in developing students' language abilities; there are some which should be reconsidered. And they should be sometimes modified, sometimes tweaked to suit a specific classroom. To suit a specific level of students. There should be some kind of flexibility in the system, which we currently don't have **(Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs)**. But more or less, the system is developing students' abilities. It is in the right direction, but there is definitely room for improvement.

**Researcher:** Since the introduction of the new FYP Programme, have you attended any Professional Development programmes here?

**Raj:** You mean relevant to assessment?

**Researcher:** No, I mean in general.

**Raj:** Yes, we have. Once or twice a year we have workshops. And now there is a new trend here. Different units, Professional Development Unit, they have some workshops some kind of seminars (PD and Testing under Teachers Beliefs).

**Researcher:** Did any of these programmes involve assessment?

**Raj:** I don't remember exactly, but I think there was one or two that had some assessment in them. They talked about assessment in general. Nothing specific (Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs). But people working in the Assessment Unit were sent for training at the British Council.

**Researcher:** Do you feel that the ELI allows their own teachers to assess their own students in the classroom?

**Raj:** The kind of formative diagnostic assessment is possible. Teachers can do that of course. But it won't be part of continuous assessment or assessment in terms of students' achievement. Continuous Assessment is not in the hands of teachers. These things- marks and such on- are controlled by the system (Marking under Summative Assessment & Top-Down Policy under Teachers Beliefs).

Teachers can of course. When you are in the class, you have to assess your students. Only then, you can plan activities. So, a kind of diagnostic assessment is done and should be done in the classroom. And I hope, many teachers are administering some kind of diagnostic tests. But the Summative Assessment is usually controlled by the system and teachers don't have a saying in that.

**Researcher:** Thank you; I have finished all my questions. Would you like to add anything before we end this interview?

**Raj:** I think we discussed all the things quite extensively. But later on when you go through the transcripts, if you have any questions, you are welcome. Even when you get back to the United Kingdom, you can call me from there. Any further clarifications-- I can give you.

**Researcher:** Thank you very much; I really appreciate that.

## Appendix (2) First Draft of Interview Questions

### OLD/ Pre-piloting Interview questions protocol

The study will investigate the teachers' role and beliefs in assessment in the English Language Institution at [REDACTED] University. The two research questions are:

1. What is the role of the ELI teachers in the language assessment practices available in the institution?
2. What are the teachers' philosophies concerning language assessment?

Dear colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I am going to record your comments but you can stop recording at any time if you like. As I mentioned in the consent form your responses will be confidential and you will not be identified in any reports.

I will start off with some questions about you.

Age, education, years of experience, country of origin.

1. Did you learn any foreign language?
2. Tell me about your experience in learning this language?
3. Do you think this experience affected the way you teach?
4. What kind of assessment do you remember as a student?
5. What is your best/worst experience? How did it make you feel? Did any of those affect your current assessment practices?

I want to know what are the current ELI Assessment practices that the teachers are involved in. I would like you to think about the last semester. I want to know about any classes or sessions that included some sort of assessment. I will ask you some specific questions about your role in those practices.

1. I want to know how teachers think about assessment. What do you do when you start planning the assessment procedures? Could you please walk me through your thinking process as best as you can?
2. What do you do to prepare yourself to implement the assessment?
3. Are there any specific decisions you have to make (Date, timing etc.)?
  - a. Do you have any freedom when you implement your assessment practices? (or are they given to you, and you just have to implement them)
  - b. Do you decide how often and when to implement assessment practices?
  - c. Were you happy with how the assessment went on?
4. Did you anticipate anything would go wrong? And did it?
5. Tell me what sort of feedback do you give students after the assessment? do you decide how often to give students feedback? Or is that decided for you?
  - a. Please describe the procedure used to give students feedback?
6. Is there any student self-evaluation? or peer evaluation? if yes please give me more details.
7. After you have completed your assessment, does this affect your teaching in any way?
8. Do you explain to your students how would you grade their tests? do you give them the results and how? do you use these results for amending your teaching in any way?

Thank you, now I would like to ask you some questions about your beliefs concerning assessment and testing.

1. From your point of view, why do you think we assess/test our ELI students?
2. Talk to me about the purpose of assessment in the institution. What is your role? has this role changed over the past years?
3. What do you think about the current assessment procedures in the ELI?
4. Are they sufficient?
  - a. Do you think anything should be included or excluded?
5. Do you think that your beliefs and understandings about assessment are similar to other teachers and institution?
  - a. How do you know that?
  - b. How does this make you feel?
6. What do you think about the amount of formal assessment (tests) that students have to endure? is it too much? do we need more?
7. Do you feel competent when assessing your students? do you need any support? Why do you/why don't you?
8. Do you feel that teachers should concentrate on teaching only, and leave the tests/test preparations for the "assessment people"?
9. Where do you stand, with regards to involving students in assessment practices?
10. Do you provide your students with feedback on their tests/assessments? why you do that/why don't you do that?
11. Do you think that you have the appropriate sufficient skills and knowledge about language assessment?
  - a. If not what do you, need to know or learn about language assessment).
  - b. How are you going to learn about this? on your own? do you expect the institution to help you in any way?
12. Since the introduction of the new FYP Program, have you attended any Professional Development programs here? If yes, which ones?
  - a. Did any of those programmes involved assessment?
13. Do you feel that the ELI has a lack of trust in its teachers to accurately assess their students?
14. Would you like to add anything before we finish this interview?

Thank you for your time, I really appreciate it, you have all my information in the consent form please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or further comments.

## **Appendix (3)      Final Draft of Interview Questions**

### **Teachers' Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

The study will investigate the teachers' role and beliefs in assessment in the English Language Institution at [REDACTED]. The two research questions are:

1. What is the role of the ELI teachers in the language assessment practices available in the institution?
2. What are the teachers' philosophies concerning language assessment?

Dear colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I am going to record your comments but you can stop recording at any time if you like. As I mentioned in the consent form your responses will be confidential and you will not be identified in any reports.

I will start off with some questions about you.

Age, education, years of experience, country of origin.

1. Did you learn any foreign language?
2. Tell me about your experience in learning this language?
3. Do you think this experience affected the way you teach?
4. What kind of foreign Language assessment do you remember as a student?
  - a. What is your best/worst experience? How did it make you feel? Did any of those affect your current assessment practices?

I want to know what are the current ELI Assessment practices that the teachers are involved in... I would like you to think about the last semester. I want to know about any classes or sessions that included some sort of assessment. I will ask you some specific questions about your role in those practices.

1. I want to know how teachers think about assessment. What do you do when you start planning the assessment procedures? Could you please walk me through your thinking process as best as you can?
2. What do you do to prepare yourself to implement assessment?
3. Are there any specific decisions you have to make (Date, timing, etc.)?
4. Do you have any freedom when you implement your assessment practices?  
If a limited response is given, I will follow up with: (Are assessment practices given to you? You feel like you only have to implement them?)
  - a. Do you decide how often and when to implement assessment practices?
  - b. Were you happy with how the assessment went on?
5. What sort of feedback do you give students after the assessment? do you decide how often to give students feedback? Or is that decided for you?
  - a. Please describe the Procedures used to give students feedback?
6. Is there any student self-evaluation? or peer evaluation? if yes please give me more details.
7. After you have completed your assessment, does this affect your teaching in any way?
8. Do you explain to your students how would you grade their tests? do you give them the results and how? do you use these results for amending your teaching in any way?

Thank you, now I would like to ask you some questions about your **beliefs** concerning assessment and testing.

1. From your point of view, why do you think we assess/test our ELI students?
2. Talk to me about the purpose of assessment in the institution.
3. What is your role? Has this role changed over the past years?
4. What do you think about the current assessment procedures in the ELI?

If a limited response is given, I will follow up with:

1. Are they sufficient?
  - a. Do you think anything should be included or excluded?

5. Do you think that your beliefs and understandings about assessment are similar to other teachers and institution?
  - a. How do you know that?
  - b. What do you think about the differences or similarities?
6. What do you think about the amount of formal assessment (tests) that students have to endure? is it too much? do we need more?
7. Do you feel that teachers should concentrate on teaching only, and leave the tests/test preparations for the “assessment people”?

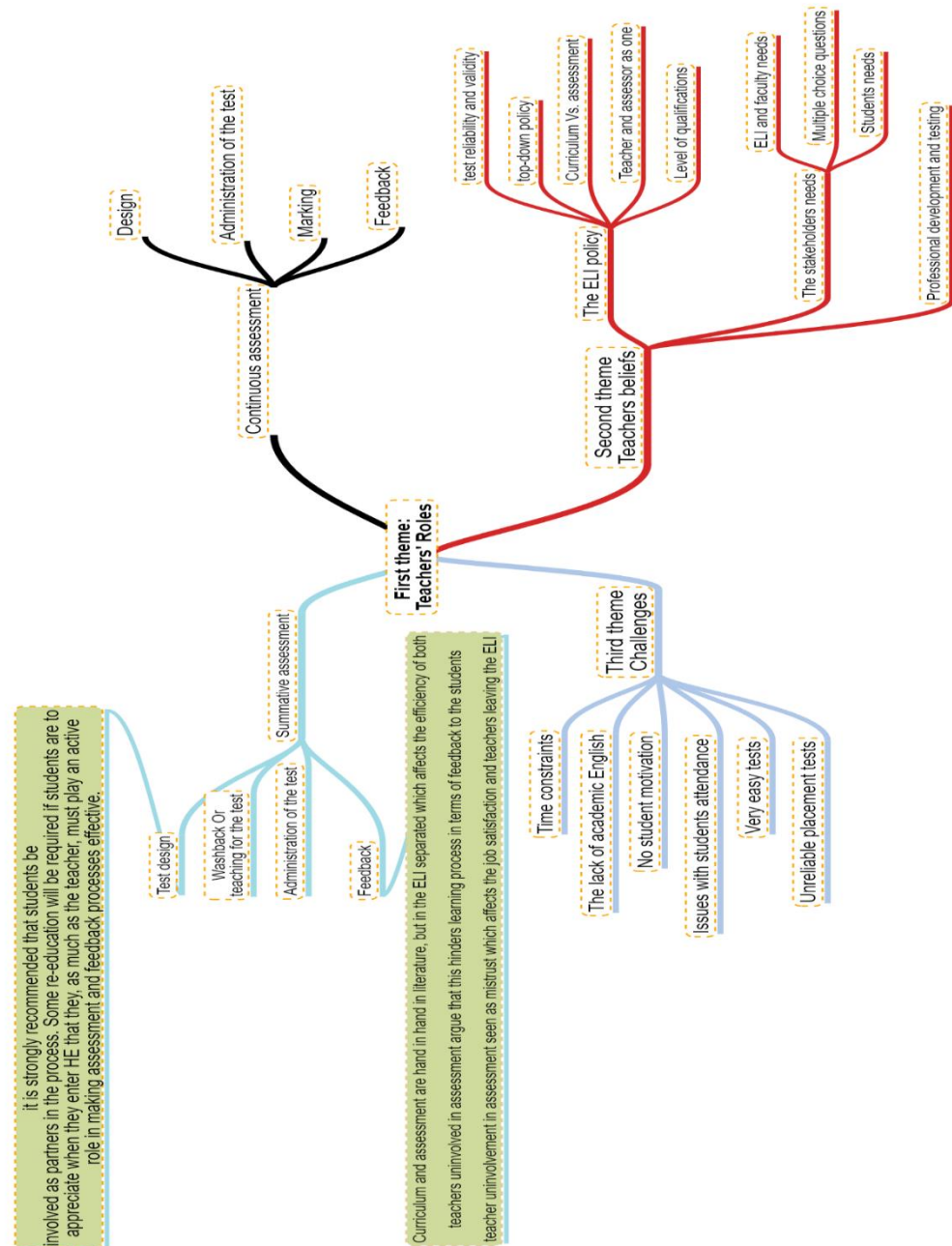
If a limited response is given, I will follow up with:

- Do you feel competent when assessing your students? do you need any support? Why do you/why don't you?
8. Where do you stand, with regards to involving students in assessment practices?
  9. Do you provide your students with feedback on their tests/assessments? why you do that/why don't you do that?
  10. Do you think that you have the appropriate skills and knowledge about language assessment?
    - a. If not what do you, need to know or learn about language assessment).
    - b. How are you going to learn about this? On your own? Do you expect the institution to help you in anyway?
  11. Since the introduction of the new FYP Program, have you attended any Professional Development programs here? If yes, which ones?
    - a. Did any of those programmes involved assessment?
  12. What does ELI think about the teachers assessing their own students?
  13. Would you like to add anything before we finish this interview?

Thank you for your time, I really appreciate it, you have all my information in the consent form please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or further comments.



## Appendix (4) Initial Data Analysis Mind Map



## Appendix (5) Sample of Data Analysis Stages

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	
Quotes	Codes	Categories	Sub-themes	Theme
<p><b>Document:</b> 01 Wadee (M)  <b>Position:</b> 33 - 33  ... of course not all teachers are involved in designing tests in the institution. Only the teachers work in the assessment committee have a saying in the test format and questions. You have to keep in mind that all of the questions have to be multiple-choice questions.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 01 Wadee (M)  <b>Position:</b> 98 - 98  my role did change over the past few years. I remember that I was more involved in the assessment by preparing exams and actually choosing the way to assess my students. I mean in the past the teacher could teach we had a lot of power and flexibility...</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 03 Iqbal (M)  <b>Position:</b> 69 - 69  when it comes to designing the test I believe teachers have a small role in that. Tests are initially designed by the assessment committee and then given to us as teachers to administer them with the students.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 04 Saeed (M)  <b>Position:</b> 254 - 257  as I told you before these tests are done by the assessment committee people. I heard that sometimes they would make teachers take the tests and then give them feedback and comments.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 20 Afnan  <b>Position:</b> 16 - 16  teachers don't have a role in preparing any of the tests</p>	<p>Non-involvement in test design</p> <p>History of teachers' role in test design</p> <p>No role in test design</p> <p>The role is limited to the assessment committee</p> <p>No role in test design</p>	<p>Test design and Summative Assessment</p>	<p>Teachers Roles in Summative Assessment</p>	<p>Teachers Roles</p>

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	
Quotes	Codes	Categories	Sub-themes	Theme
<p><b>Document:</b> 01 Wadee (M) <b>Position:</b> 21 - 21 I believe that the students are not learning now, they are only working for the exams. And somehow they forget about the learning and just concentrate on the exams.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 01 Wadee (M) <b>Position:</b> 138 - 138 Even in the classroom students don't listen any more to the teacher because they are only interested in the grades.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 02 Raj (M) <b>Position:</b> 62 - 62 To be frank that is one of the problems you see as soon as they know how little they are going to get for class participation and continuous assessment in the classroom they are immediately uninterested. They start asking about the final exam and the mid module exam as they hold 60% of the Mark. This in turn shifts the focus in the classroom to the midterm and final exam. and of course the regular question we always get need the end of the module "Teacher is this going to be in the Final exam?"</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 09 Medhat (M) <b>Position:</b> 109 - 109 We are actually helping in just making the student just exam oriented. "I want to pass the subject not to learn"</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 20 Afnan (F) <b>Position:</b> 76 - 76 I noticed this even in my classes... If I ask the students to do something... Their response would be "would you grade this? Would this be graded?" So exactly if it is not graded then nobody cares.</p>	<p><b>Students only concentrating on the test</b></p> <p><b>disengaged students due to the test</b></p> <p><b>Washback affecting teaching</b></p> <p><b>Washback affecting teaching</b></p> <p><b>Teachers role limited to preparing students to the test</b></p>	<p><b>Washback and Summative Assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles in Summative assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles</b></p>

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	
Quotes	Codes	Categories	Sub-themes	Theme
<p><b>Document:</b> 01 Wadee (M)  <b>Position:</b> 44 - 46  I mean nowadays the teachers are only invigilators while the test is taking place. You go into the computer's lab you make sure that each student is allocated in his seat and that he does not cheat from his colleague or any other source. Anything that has to do with the mid-term or the final exam are marked by the computer nowadays. [...] other than administering the tests. I don't believe we have any role in the summative assessment practices.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 03 Iqbal (M)  <b>Position:</b> 17 - 17  Well in the classroom the teacher is the one performing the continuous assessment with the students unlike the midterm and the final exam which is performed nowadays in a lap. We just attend and invigilate the exams</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 17 Rami (M)  <b>Position:</b> 177 - 177  They faced during the computer-based program tests. And if they face any difficult thing, we try to explain it to them. However, that's sometimes tricky because we are not actually involved in preparing the test... we only invigilate during the tests.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 20 Afnan (F)  <b>Position:</b> 20 - 20  Even on the day of the exams. If any issued jest pops out. The teachers usually can't deal with it. They just ask for the examination quality control people, who are usually in the building and they are the ones who deal with it. So the teacher's role here is only to make sure that the test administration runs smoothly. The teachers don't know even the what are the questions on the test</p>	<p><b>Only Involved in Administering the Test</b></p> <p><b>Role limited to invigilation</b></p> <p><b>Role limited to invigilation</b></p> <p><b>Lack of knowledge about the test</b></p>	<p><b>Role limited to invigilation and administration of Summative Assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles in Summative Assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles</b></p>

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	
Quotes	Codes	Categories	Sub-themes	Theme
<p><b>Document:</b> 01 Wadee (M)  <b>Position:</b> 46 - 46  Wadee: no of course they don't. The computer does all the marking even in the past when it was paper-based. There used to be a machine that scans the students answers and does the marking. The teachers only Mark the continuous assessment practices in the classroom. Anything that has to do with the mid-term or the final exam are marked by the computer nowadays.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 03 Iqbal (M)  <b>Position:</b> 71 - 71  No that was done electronically. They have some sort of scanner that would Mark and correct all students' papers very quickly. The only marking we do is when we Mark the students writing or speaking or reading in the classroom.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 04 Saeed (M)  <b>Position:</b> 259 - 259  No as I told you before we don't have any access to any of the tests only the testing committee people have this sort of access.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 15 Smith (M)  <b>Position:</b> 30 - 30  Smith: And that's the real shame that they don't get the marks. I think this is a huge issue and needs to be addressed somehow.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 20 Afnan (F)  <b>Position:</b> 16 - 16  it's all done electronically ... we don't have access to the students answers and marks</p>	<p><b>Teachers don't mark the tests</b></p> <p><b>Test marking/grading is computerised</b></p> <p><b>No access to the tests marks</b></p> <p><b>No access to tests marks</b></p> <p><b>Grading is done electronically</b></p>	<p><b>No role in Test Marking/ Grading of Summative Assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles in Summative Assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles</b></p>

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	
Quotes	Codes	Categories	Sub-themes	Theme
<p><b>Document:</b> 04 Saeed (M)  <b>Position:</b> 261 - 261  Saeed: Some sort of feedback. I mean we can give feedback in general about problems students have in the test. As I said with no access to their tests or results it's really quite difficult to give individual feedback to students.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 01 Wadee (M)  <b>Position:</b> 62 - 62  I mean the midterm and the final test teachers do not have the opportunity to give feedback on the test. We are not going through the questions and discussing them with the students and discussing their mistakes. We don't get the chance to do that. It is impossible, because every student has a different test with different questions. You Go through 6000 tests</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 01 Wadee (M)  <b>Position:</b> 62 - 63  But at least we should get the chance to go through the main core of the questions with the students. If a student made a mistake for example, if he doesn't have any feedback is not going to know why he did the mistake and how to correct it.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 01 Wadee (M)  <b>Position:</b> 66 - 66  But at the level of the institution there is six thousand students so it is not possible to give all of them feedback.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 02 Raj (M)  <b>Position:</b> 52 - 52</p>	<p><b>Giving very general feedback</b></p> <p><b>No opportunity to give feedback</b></p> <p><b>Lack of feedback on midterm's</b></p> <p><b>Lack of feedback due to number of students</b></p> <p><b>lack of</b></p>	<p><b>Lack of feedback in Summative Assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles in Summative Assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles</b></p>

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	
Quotes	Codes	Categories	Sub-themes	Theme
<p>Raj: well of course there's no chance to give any feedback after the final exam because the module is over and there are no more classes. And unfortunately after the mid-term exam we have nothing to give the students. You see exams are now done in a computer lab this means that each student has a different exam with a different set of questions. It's really unfortunate that teachers don't have any access to the students answers therefore no chance of the giving them any constructive feedback.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 05 Haroon (M)  <b>Position:</b> 57 - 57</p> <p>Haroon: To give the feedback. So if students ask the questions I did that in the exam, what do you think? I say, I don't know. I haven't seen, I don't have papers, I don't mark. So this is one of the thing that led, I mean, applied here in the ELI that is a computer-based exam which I think is the kind of I don't know what to say, but it has disadvantages more than advantages. Yes, for me as a teacher because I can't give students hints. I can't revise with the students after the exam and especially there are so many versions of the same exam so.</p> <p><b>Document:</b> 07 Ali (M)  <b>Position:</b> 129 - 129</p> <p>They are not giving it the attention that should be given. For example, students after each – I am talking here about the formal exams. After the mid-term exam and the final exam, the students are not allowed to check where they did right, where they did wrong. So they are not giving their papers back.</p>	<p><b>feedback on the final exam</b></p> <p><b>Inability to provide students with proper feedback on tests</b></p> <p><b>Inability of students to check their answers and get feedback</b></p>	<p><b>Lack of feedback in Summative Assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles in Summative Assessment</b></p>	<p><b>Teachers Roles</b></p>

## Appendix (6) Ethical Research Approval Form

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses.



Graduate School of Education

### Certificate of ethical research approval

MSc, PhD, EdD & DEdPsych theses

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications> and view the School's Policy online.

**READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER** (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

Your name: Mazin M Mansory

Your student no: 600034221

Return address for this certificate: 43 Julius House, New North Road, Exeter, Devon, EX44HG

Degree/Programme of Study: EdD in TESOL

Project Supervisor(s): (1<sup>st</sup>) Dr. Salah Troudi & (2<sup>nd</sup>) Dr. Shirley Larkin

Your email address: mm422@exeter.ac.uk

Tel: 00447906256555 & 00966555540212

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my thesis to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed: Mazin M. Mansory ..... date: 01<sup>st</sup> AUG 2013 .....



# Certificate of Ethical Research Approval

## TITLE OF YOUR PROJECT:

Saudi EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes towards English Language Assessment in a University Specialized English Language Provision

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### 1. Brief description of your research project:

The desire to introduce English as the medium of instruction for scientific departments in a university in Saudi Arabia has led to the introduction of a One Year Programme (OYP). During this year, the Specialized English Language Provision (SELP) at the university concentrates on raising the level of English of new students in order for them to be able to cope with studying in their desired departments in the following years. Such a drastic change in the goals of SELP has led to some changes in the assessment practices in order to cope with the new goals. Being involved in the Exams Committee in the SELP—albeit for a short time—has motivated me to investigate the EFL teachers' perceptions about the currently introduced assessment practices at the SELP. My main aim of the study is to examine the assessment practices from teachers' perspectives, in order to determine whether the current practices help or hinder the objectives of the SELP. I am also interested in the role of the teachers—if any—in designing and/or implementing the assessment practices as well as written exams offered by the SELP. Furthermore, I will also attempt to investigate their views regarding the current grading procedures and measure to what extent they address the teachers'/students needs. Moreover, the study will try to give teachers a voice in the future improvement of the assessment practices in the SELP.

### 2. Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):

The participants in this study will include 20 male and 10 female adult English language teachers, working in the SELP at a university in Saudi Arabia. All the teachers are familiar or involved with the assessment procedures in the SELP.

### Give details (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) regarding the ethical issues of:

**3. Informed Consent:** Where children in schools are involved this includes both headteachers and parents). Copy(ies) of your consent form(s) you will be using must accompany this document. A blank consent form can be downloaded from the GSE student access on-line documents: Each consent form MUST be personalised with your contact details.

My study will be in a university context with adults and will definitely not include any children. I am also attaching with this form a separate personalized consent form for the interviewees (i.e. teachers).

### 4. Anonymity and Confidentiality

All respondents throughout the report were given pseudonyms to keep their identity hidden. I will also not disclose identifiable information about my participants and will try my best to protect the identity of research participants through various processes designed to anonymise them.

**5. Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:**

I will be using document analysis and semi-structured open-ended interviews. I expect each interview last from 40 minutes to an hour and for convenience I intend conduct my interviews in offices at the university. I will do my best to ensure that the participants in my study understand that taking part is optional as I will inform each participant verbally and in writing (on the informed consent form) that they can withdraw from the interview and research at any stage he/she would like.

**6. Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project - e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires, etc**

All my interviews are going to be digitally recorded and then encrypted and safely saved in a secure laptop in addition to being on Exeter's University servers, while any hard copy data, including signed consent forms, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. All audio data will be downloaded from recording devices at the earliest possible opportunity, and then deleted immediately from those devices then all electronic data will be stored in my password protected file on the University of Exeter U-drive. I am also taking into consideration culturally-sensitive issues regarding my interviews with the female teachers, where I am aware that women's voices are an issue of contention in Saudi Arabia and I will make arrangement to have telephone interviews with them instead of face-to-face so not to put them in danger by the social and religious customs/laws. I am also sensitive to their possible reluctance to interview recordings and thus will offer to take notes instead if they refuse or are hesitant.

**7. Special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.**

None of my participants have any special needs as far as I am aware.

**8. Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):**

I am not aware of any exceptional political or ideological factors that could cause any harm or danger to the participants.

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***This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.***

***N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor***

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**This project has been approved for the period: 25<sup>th</sup> Aug 2013                      until: 23<sup>th</sup> Nov 2013**

**By** (above mentioned supervisor's signature): S.H. Lohani ..... **date:** 28/08/2013 .....

***N.B. To Supervisor:*** Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occur a further form is completed.

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**GSE unique approval reference:** D/12/13/44 .....

**Signed:** N. G. Davis ..... **date:** 16/8/13 .....  
**Chair of the School's Ethics Committee**

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Chair of the School's Ethics Committee  
updated: March 2013

## **Appendix (7)      Participant Consent Form**

### **GUIDE Information/ Consent Form FOR INTERVIEWS**

#### **Title of Research Project**

Saudi EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes towards English Language Assessment in a University Specialized English Language Provision (SELP).

#### **Details of Project**

My Name is Mazin Mansory and I am an English Language Teacher at this SELP who is currently a Research Student doing a Professional Doctorate in TESOL at Exeter University in the United Kingdom. I am currently collecting my data for my dissertation, which aims to explore the different assessment views that teachers in this SELP hold in order to gain a better understanding of teachers' roles in the Assessment Practices. I would also like to explore how tests are prepared and whether teachers have a voice in them. All the data gathered from this research will be used for this research project and future research papers.

#### **Contact Details**

For further information about the research or your interview data, please contact:

Mazin M Mansory: Research Student (Professional Doctorate in TESOL),  
Graduate School of Education  
College of Social Science and International Studies  
University of Exeter

Email:            mm422@exeter.ac.uk

Tel:    +44 (0)7906 256555 (UK) or +966 (0)5555 40212 (SAUDI ARABIA)

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Dr Salah Troudi:    The TESOL/Dubai EdD Programme Director

International Development Coordinator.

Email:            S.Troudi@exeter.ac.uk

Address:           College of Social Sciences & International Studies

St Luke's Campus

United Kingdom

#### **Confidentiality**

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed

access to them (except as may be required by the law). However, if you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of *your* interview transcript so that you can comment on and edit it as you see fit (please give your email below). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act indefinitely on an anonymous basis.

### **Anonymity**

Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name or the group of which you are a member.

### **Consent**

I understand the following:

- That there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and may also request that my data be destroyed.
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.
- Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conferences or seminar presentations.
- The information, which I give, may be shared (in an anonymised form) with my research supervisor(s).
- All information I give will be treated as confidential.
- The researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

TICK HERE: •

DATE.....

Note: Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data

Name of interviewee: .....

Signature: .....

Email/ phone: .....

Signature of researcher.....

2 copies to be signed by both interviewee and researcher, one kept by each